

Avila Beach, California

People and Place

Location

Avila Beach covers 1.28 square miles of land and is located along California's central coast on the north shore of San Luis Obispo Bay, just south of San Luis Obispo. It is approximately 195 miles north of Los Angeles and 241 miles south of San Francisco. The geographic coordinates of Avila Beach, California, are: 35°10'48"N, 120°43'51"W.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Avila Beach was 797. In 2000 the gender structure was evenly divided with slightly more females (50.7%) than males (49.3%). The median age of the population in 2000 was 58.9, which is considerably higher than the national median of 35.3 for the same year. According to the same data, 39.5% of the population was between the ages of 25 and 59, while 49.1% were age 60 or older. For the population 18 years and over, 94.3% had a high school education or higher, 36.0% had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 16.3% earned a graduate or professional degree. The highest level of educational attainment was a high school diploma/equivalency for 13.9% of the population. In 2000, 70.0% of the population lived in family households.

The 2000 U.S. Census shows that the racial composition was predominantly White (95.1%) and Asian (1.0%). Black or African American, American Indian and Alaskan native, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander each constituted less than one percent of the population in 2000: (0.4%, 0.4%, and 0.3% respectively). Overall, 0.8% classified themselves as belonging to some other race and 2.1% of the population identified themselves with two or more races. A total of 4.3% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino. Slightly over five percent (5.2%) of the population was foreign-born.

History

The community of Avila Beach shares much of its history with the surrounding area in southern San Luis Obispo County. The Chumash Indian occupied the area 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 Chumashes 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

Spaniards and Portuguese made use of the sheltered Avila beach coastline to replenish freshwater supplies, trade with the Chumash Indians, and rest from the open ocean. In 1873 the Harford Wharf was constructed by John Harford to facilitate trading and mail delivery. The area's history as a prime destination for rest and recreation, now the foundation of Avila Beach's economy, began in 1876 when the Marre Hotel was built at the Port San Luis. Access to the area expanded dramatically with the railroad in the 1880s. A decade later, in the 1890s, a federal breakwater was built to provide safer anchorage at the wharf. In 1954 the Harbor District for the Port San Luis Area was created to maintain aging marine facilities and generate commerce for the region. In 1955 the State Legislature granted the Harbor District the area's tidelands in trust. Today the State owns the waters out to three miles and is charged with managing tideland resources.⁴

Infrastructure

Current Economy

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 42.4% of the potential labor force was employed and there was a 4.8% unemployment rate (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). Of the population over the age of 16, 55.3% were not in the labor force, which is considerably higher than the national average for the same year (36.1%). Of the employed civilian population, 24.9% worked in "Educational, health and social services" while 28.0% worked in "Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services," the majority of those falling under "Accommodation and food services." The local, state, or federal government employed 25.5% of the civilian population in 2000, however none were reported as working in the "Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining" industries. None 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.

Avila Beach's per capita income in 1999 was \$29,033 according to the U.S. Census, while the median household income was \$39,792. In 1999 a total of 8.1% of the population was below the poverty level. In 2000 there were 554 housing units in Avila Beach, 80.9% of which were occupied, 19.1% were vacant. Of the occupied housing

units, 61.2% were owner occupied and 38.8% were renter occupied. Over half (57.5%) of the vacant housing units were for “seasonal, recreational, or occasional” use.

Governance

Like several of California’s coastal communities, Avila Beach has no city governance structure and is therefore under the county’s jurisdiction. San Luis Obispo County levies 7.25 sales and use tax rate and a 9.0% transient lodging tax, which earned \$4,229,463 in revenue for the 2000-2001 fiscal year.⁵

California state law assesses commercial vessels, charter boats, and oceanographic research vessels at 4% of their full cash value.⁶ 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.⁷ Some commercial vessels are also subject to a Ballast Water Management Fee of about \$500 per voyage.⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

There is a California Department of Fish and Game Marine Region Field Office and a U.S. Coast Guard station located approximately 23 miles away in Morro Bay. Foster City, approximately 223 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

Avila Beach is located along U.S. Highway 1. San Luis Obispo Municipal Airport is situated 7 miles away, while the nearest international airport is 181 miles away in Los Angeles. Avila Beach belongs to the Lucia Mar Unified School District, which is comprised of 10 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 2 comprehensive high schools, 1 continuation high school and adult education program. The County administers public safety in Avila Beach. Pacific Gas and Electric supplies electricity to all of San Luis Obispo County. The tourism industry in Avila Beach is well developed, providing several options for accommodations.

A three-pier harbor, two piers of which are open to the public, supports the active commercial and recreational fishing industries. A Harbor Commission of elected officials oversees the marine facilities. Harbor services include drydock, fuel and ice, boat repair and supply, and storage for commercial gear at a rate of \$30 per month. Boat storage for trailer boats up to 30 feet long and 10 feet wide at a monthly rate of \$50, with a three-month minimum time period. Temporary boat moorage can be rented from the water taxi operator.¹²

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 landings were delivered to Avila Beach by 127 commercially registered vessels. Landings in Avila Beach were made in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels making landings): coastal pelagic (confidential/confidential/2), crab (37 t/\$127,746/14), groundfish (370 t/\$703,769/88), highly migratory species (6 t/\$12,884/24), salmon (35 t/\$134,357/38), shrimp (15 t/\$30,518/6), and other species (14 t/\$77,510/44). According to available data, there were no seafood processors operating in Avila Beach in 2000.

There were six commercial vessels owned by Avila Beach residents in 2000, two of which participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. According to recorded data the number of vessels owned by Avila Beach residents in 2000 that participated in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/0/1), groundfish (0/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), salmon (0/0/4), shellfish (NA/0/NA), and shrimp (NA/0/7).¹³

In 2000, there were no federal groundfish permits held by community members. In the same year, recorded data indicates that the number of Avila Beach residents holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/0/1), groundfish (0/0/6), highly migratory species (NA/0/1), salmon (0/0/9), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (0/0/2), and other species (0/0/9).¹⁴

According to available data, there were at least 37 commercial fishing permits registered to Avila Beach residents in 2000. Recorded data indicates that the number of state permits held by Avila Beach residents in 2000 in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/0/1), groundfish (0/0/7), highly migratory species (NA/0/1), salmon (0/0/16), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (0/0/2), and other species (0/0/10).¹⁵

Sportfishing

There is a 1685-foot long public fishing pier in Avila. A number of charter vessels operate out of Avila Beach targeting albacore tuna, rock cod, salmon, and other species. Many of these charter vessels also offer seasonal whale watching tours. In 2002, at least 12 charter businesses serviced sport fishermen and tourists in Morro Bay. There are two license agents selling sportfishing licenses in Avila Beach. In 2000 San Luis Obispo County residents held: 43,399 resident sportfishing licenses, 40 nonresident 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 Avila Beach area. However, specific information on subsistence fishing in Avila Beach 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 was no involvement in North Pacific fisheries by Avila Beach residents.

Sportfishing

While the majority of the sport fishermen in Avila Beach target West Coast fisheries, five Avila Beach community members purchased Alaska sportfishing licenses in 2000.

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- 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 Avila Beach History. No Date. Port San Luis Harbor District, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.portsanluis.com/>: (access date - February 2005).
- ⁵ 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).
- ⁶ 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).
- ⁷ 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).
- ⁸ 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).
- ⁹ 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).
- ¹⁰ 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).
- ¹¹ State of California Department of Agriculture. 2004. List of Marketing Programs, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.cdafa.ca.gov/mkt/mkt/mktbrds.html> (access date - July 2004).
- ¹² Port San Luis Harbor District. No Date. Harbor Services, [Online]. Available: <http://www.portsanluis.com> (access date - March 2005).
- ¹³ '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.
- 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.