

# Fort Bragg, California

## People and Place

### *Location*

Fort Bragg is located on Northern California's Pacific Coast at 39°26'45"N and 123°48'19"W.<sup>1</sup> Noyo Harbor, an all-weather commercial fishing port, lies at the southern edge of the City on the mouth of the Noyo River. The community is bordered to the north by Pudding Creek, which flows into the Pacific Ocean through a narrow inlet. San Francisco, which lies about 172 miles to the south, is the nearest major metropolitan area. Fort Bragg encompasses 2.73 square miles of land and 0.04 square miles of water.<sup>2</sup>

### *Demographic Profile*

According to the 2000 U.S. Census Fort Bragg had a population of 7026. Fort Bragg featured a population of 6078 residents in 1990, revealing a population growth rate of 16.6% between 1990 and 2000. The community displayed an even gender balance, with 50.1% male and 49.9% female residents. The median age of the population in Fort Bragg was about 36.2, a value similar to the national median age of 35.3. Fort Bragg's population in 2000 lived in 2840 households, with 74.7% of the population living in family households.

The racial composition of Fort Bragg, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, was 70.9% White, 1.5% American Indian and Alaska Native, 1% Black or African American, 0.8% Asian, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Approximately 12.1% of residents identified with some other race and 4.6% with two or more races. About 22.7% of the population identified as Hispanic or Latino, a proportion significantly larger than the national value of 12.5%. The ethnic composition of the community changed significantly between the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Censuses, with a 65.7% net increase in the City's Hispanic population over the ten-year period. A total of 13.5% of the population was foreign-born. Approximately 78.4% of foreign-born residents originated in Mexico, 12.8% in Europe (UK, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, and Portugal), and 6% in Canada.

About 48.4% of Fort Bragg residents 18 and over had a high school diploma or equivalency or higher, 11.7% had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 4.6% had completed a graduate or professional degree. These percentages fall below those for the nation overall. The highest level of educational attainment for 34.1% of residents 18 and over was a high school degree.

### *History*

Northern California was originally inhabited by several related native groups known today as Pomo Indians. There has never been a single Pomo Tribe, but rather 72 independent tribes speaking seven related but distinct languages.<sup>3</sup> Pomo groups wove intricate baskets and fashioned beads from clamshells and magnesite that were used as a regional trade currency. All Pomo communities subsisted via hunting and gathering, and coastal groups relied heavily on salmon, marine shellfish (especially sea mussels), and sea mammals (particularly Stellar sea lions, California sea lions, sea otters, Northern fur seals, and harbor seals).<sup>4</sup> Native hunters and fisherman developed a complex set of technologies to efficiently harvest these resources, and community life often focused on rituals surrounding the first harvests of the season and cooperative fishing endeavors. Acorns were also an important vegetable food.

After Russian fur traders and Spanish missionaries established the first European settlements in the region in the early 1800s, native populations were rapidly decimated by disease and conflicts with incoming settlers. Additionally, military units were sent to remove native peoples from ancestral lands. A commission from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) signed 18 treaties with California tribes between 1851 and 1852. These agreements would have reserved about 8.5 million acres for native peoples, but with the Gold Rush in full swing, none of these treaties were ratified by Congress.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the BIA established a unique system of smaller reservations and “rancherias” in California. Survivors later described their forced removal to these reservations as “death marches.”<sup>6</sup>

As part of California’s policy of removing native peoples to smaller internments, the Mendocino Indian Reservation was established in 1856 on 25,000 acres between the Ten Mile and Noyo Rivers. Fort Bragg was founded in 1857 as a military outpost to “control and safeguard” native residents living on this reservation.<sup>7</sup> The Fort was named after Captain Braxton Bragg, who later became a Confederate general, sparking a brief, unsuccessful drive to change the name of the installation. The reservation and military outpost were abandoned in 1867 as disease, opportunities for work in other areas, and violent encounters with settlers and the military itself shrunk the native population from several thousand to around 280. The remaining native population was then relocated to the Round Valley Reservation in Covello, and the land around the fort was sold to Euro-American settlers.<sup>8</sup>

The official disbandment of the Fort did not signal the end of the community of Fort Bragg, which quickly became a major player in the region’s timber industry.<sup>9</sup> The same year that the Fort was established (1857), a local entrepreneur was granted a parcel of reservation land to create a mill site on the Noyo River. Following his example, settlers who purchased land after the reservation’s closure built small lumber mills at the mouth of every creek. Timber development in the area finally boomed in 1885, when the founder of the Union Lumber Company built a larger operation and began planning a city that could serve as a hub for shipping mill products and house loggers and their families. The City of Fort Bragg was incorporated in 1889, and the Union Lumber Company built railroad lines and partnered with the National Steamship Company to export forest products and import manufactured goods for the community’s growing population.

Union Lumber’s original mill grew and changed ownership over the years, employing thousands of workers during an industry peak in the 1960s and 70s. The Georgia-Pacific Corporation (G-P) acquired the mill in 1972, and G-P remained the region’s major employer until August 2002, when it closed the Fort Bragg facility. This closure signaled the end of an era for the community and the loss of several hundred jobs linked to the mill.<sup>10</sup> Other smaller mills in the area soon followed suit. In 2003, the last sawmill in Fort Bragg, Mendocino Forest Products, closed after over 50 years of operation, citing California’s regulatory system, a decrease in local logging, and the expense of importing logs from other states as reasons for closure.<sup>11</sup> At the time of this writing in 2004, community leaders were negotiating with Georgia Pacific and development advisors to construct new uses for the 430-acre mill site, which dominates the City’s shoreline. Proposals included residential and commercial enterprises, a luxury hotel, a marine research center, and an abalone aquaculture farm. Re-development of the site has become a controversial centerpiece of political life in Fort Bragg.

Commercial fishing has also contributed significantly to the economic base and history of the community. Noyo Bay, at the southern edge of Fort Bragg, provides a natural harbor and convenient access to the ocean salmon fishery. In the 1920s, the first motorized trolling vessels

were introduced in Noyo Bay, and fisherman began to land millions of pounds of salmon that were processed and marketed in Fort Bragg. Substantial salmon harvests continued in the Fort Bragg area until the mid 1990s.<sup>12</sup> Despite the decline of the salmon industry, fishing remains a viable and important part of Fort Bragg's economy and community identity, and fisherman have developed alternative strategies to remain in the industry. Many boat owners offer private charter services for tourists and sport fishermen. In addition to reduced quantities of salmon, area commercial and recreational fisherman harvest rockfish, abalone, crabs, and mussels in nearby waters.<sup>13</sup> The City is also home to two fish processors, a liquid fish fertilizer processing plant, and numerous businesses associated with fishing and coastal tourism.

Several festivals in Fort Bragg point to the City's continued cultural and economic dependence on fishing and logging. The largest of these celebrations is the World's Largest Salmon Barbeque, held each Fourth of July since 1971.<sup>14</sup> The barbeque serves as a fundraiser for the Salmon Restoration Association and features local celebrity chefs serving all-you-can-eat salmon. In the past, local fisherman donated a portion of their salmon catch and staffed the event, but, due to the relative closure of the local salmon fishery, event organizers now purchase much of the salmon from dealers in southern ports. The event draws large numbers of tourists to Fort Bragg, and profits are still used for salmon propagation and habitat improvement projects. The City's economic dependence on the salmon fishery has declined somewhat, but cultural identification with this resource remains strong. Fort Bragg also hosts a Whale Festival in March that attracts many visitors. The City's Paul Bunyan Days, a Labor Day tradition for the past 60 years, celebrates the area's participation in the logging industry.<sup>15</sup>

## **Infrastructure**

### *Current Economy*

Historically, Fort Bragg's economy has depended heavily on the timber and fishing industries, retail and visitor services, and jobs within the government. In the year prior to its closure, the Georgia-Pacific mill employed 125 workers collecting \$6.4 million in wages.<sup>16</sup> Several hundred additional jobs depended on the corporation's contracts with vendors and independent loggers. Another 59 employees lost their jobs when Mendocino Forest Products closed its operation in 2003. In the wake of the declining lumber industry, tourism and commercial fishing have become even more significant employers. Ocean Fresh Seafood Products, which specializes in processing sea urchins for the Japanese market, provides a number of full-time and seasonal positions. Caito Fisheries, the oldest fish processor in Noyo Harbor, also employs a number of workers at its local facility, and several successful charter boat companies operate out of Noyo Harbor. Lodging and hospitality services associated with Noyo Bay and coastal tourism are also major employers and revenue generators for the city. Local officials hope that the rapidly developing tourist industry will help bolster and diversify the city's economy.<sup>17</sup> Other major employers include the Fort Bragg Unified School District and the Mendocino Coast District Hospital.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 57.1% of Fort Bragg residents 16 and over were employed in 2000, and 37.6% were not in the labor force (not actively seeking work). The unemployment rate in Fort Bragg was 8.4%, a value higher than the national rate of 5.7% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). These data were derived prior to the closure of the G-P sawmill, and this rate may have increased in recent years. Approximately 8.3% of the City's employed civilian population 16 and over indicated that they worked in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, but this number may not reflect a number of

self-employed fisherman, loggers, and other contractors. About 21.1% worked in arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services, with the vast majority of these workers concentrated in accommodation and food services. Approximately 20.1% were employed in education, health, and social services, 10.9% in retail trade, 8.7% in manufacturing, and 7.2% in construction. A substantial 14.4% were employed by the government, but only 0.4% of residents were in the military.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census the per capita income in Fort Bragg was about \$15,832 in 1999, compared to a national per capita income of \$21,587. The median household income in Fort Bragg was about \$28,539, compared to a national median household income of \$41,994. Approximately 40.9% of residents were living below the poverty level in 1999, a value over three times larger than the national poverty level of 12.4%.

There were 3051 housing units in Fort Bragg in 2000. Approximately 6.9% of these units were vacant and 27% of these vacant units were intended for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. About 42.9% of occupied housing units were owner-occupied, compared to 66.2% ownership for occupied housing units in the U.S. overall.

### *Governance*

Fort Bragg was incorporated in 1889 and operates under a Council-Manager model of government.<sup>18</sup> A five-member City Council acts as the local legislative body, which sets policy and constructs the City budget. The City Council appoints a Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, City Manager, and members of the Planning Commission. A contracted City Attorney verifies that all city business conforms to applicable laws. Fort Bragg levies a 7.25% sales tax on regular purchases and a 10% transient lodging (hotel) tax.<sup>19,20</sup>

Noyo Harbor does not lie within Fort Bragg city limits, and harbor facilities fall under the jurisdiction of Mendocino County and the Noyo Harbor District.<sup>21, 22</sup> The District is governed by a five-member Board of Harbor Commissioners appointed by the Fort Bragg City Council and the County Board of Supervisors. The Noyo Harbor District operates on funds derived from Mendocino County property taxes and revenue collected for slip rental and hoist and pier fees.

Mendocino County taxes property at a rate of 1% of full cash valuation for most types of property, but, by California state law, commercial fishing vessels, charter boats, and oceanographic research vessels are assessed at 4% of their full cash value for tax purposes.<sup>23</sup> Some commercial vessels are also subject to a Ballast Water Management Fee of about \$500 per voyage.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

The State of California levies landing taxes that must be paid by fishermen and fish processors involved in the retail sale of fish products.<sup>26</sup> These taxes vary by species and range between \$.0013 and \$.0125 per pound of fish.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

Fort Bragg lies within the jurisdiction of the Pacific Fisheries Management Council and is approximately 172 driving miles from council meetings in San Francisco, 666 miles from San Diego, 547 miles from Portland, and 720 miles from Seattle. The nearest U.S. Coast Guard Station is located 107 miles to the south in Bodega Bay.<sup>29</sup> Fort Bragg is located in California Department of Fish and Wildlife Marine Region 7, which is headquartered 286 miles to the south

in Monterey.<sup>30</sup> The nearest field offices for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) are in San Francisco.

### *Facilities*

The Little River/Mendocino County airport, which offers an un-maintained airstrip, is located 15 miles south of Fort Bragg. This facility supports private planes, air taxis, and some scenic whale watching flights. The nearest airport certified for carrier flights is the Sonoma County Airport in Santa Rosa (118 miles), and the nearest major international airport is located in San Francisco (172 miles).

The Fort Bragg Unified School District serves residents of Fort Bragg and the surrounding area. The district supports two elementary schools, a middle school, a traditional high school, an alternative high school for students with unique learning needs, an independent home study school, and an adult learning center. The Mendocino County Regional Occupational Program, which offers training in agricultural and computer sciences and special education classes, is also headquartered in Fort Bragg. Apart from these public schools and facilities, the community also supports two parochial elementary and middle schools and a private preparatory school that offers grades one through twelve. The College of the Redwoods Mendocino Coast campus, a two-year community college, is also located in Fort Bragg.<sup>31</sup>

Fort Bragg operates wastewater and drinking water treatment plants, both of which are administered by the City's Public Work Department.<sup>32</sup> Natural gas is not available in the area. Electricity is provided by the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Law enforcement and public safety services are administered by the Fort Bragg Police Department. The Fort Bragg Fire Protection Authority operates a central fire station in the City's downtown area, as well as a second fire station and water storage facility on Highway 20. The main health care facility in Fort Bragg is the Mendocino Coast District Hospital. Additional hospitals are located in Willits (35 miles), Garberville (66 miles), and Ukiah (58 miles).<sup>33</sup> At least 18 hotels, 11 bed and breakfast inns, 5 campgrounds, 4 RV parks, and 1 vacation rental business are located in the vicinity of Fort Bragg.<sup>34</sup> These cater mainly to the large volume of tourists that vacation in the area.

Marine facilities in the Fort Bragg area are located at Noyo Harbor, just south of the city.<sup>35,36</sup> Noyo Harbor is considered to be one of four main harbors between San Francisco and the Oregon border, and it supports a large commercial fishing fleet. The harbor features two public launch ramps, a 10,000 pound hoist with an 8-foot beam, and 265 berths for commercial vessels. These berths are generally fully occupied with a waiting list of about 20 vessels depending on the season. The harbor is maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers, which periodically dredges and removes silt. The harbor area also features numerous support facilities, such as fuel, ice, restaurants, and lodging.

## **Involvement in West Coast Fisheries**

### *Commercial Fishing*

Commercial fishing is an extremely lucrative sector of Fort Bragg's economy. In 2000, 283 vessels, all commercially registered, delivered landings to Fort Bragg's Noyo Harbor. Thirteen of Fort Bragg's 144 vessels in 2000 were trawlers that specialized in harvesting groundfish. In 2003, as part of the Groundfish Vessel Buyback Program that sought to reduce the number of boats participating in the groundfish fishery, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) bought the fishing rights and licenses for five of the 13 trawlers in Fort Bragg. These

five trawlers were then retired completely from any fishing activity. Fisherman who sold their boats as part of this program did so for numerous reasons. In a common explanation, one buy-back participant told a local paper that he elected to sell because he had no children to take over his fishing business and could rely on other sources of income on land.<sup>37</sup>

According to recorded data, landings for Fort Bragg in 2000 were in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): crab (192.4 t/\$924,532/54), groundfish (1933.3 t/\$2,975,551/135), highly migratory species (27.8 t/\$46,524/16), salmon (181 t/\$722485/131), shrimp (23.5 t/\$256778.2977/11), and other species (992.3 t/\$1,939,483/84).

Fort Bragg residents owned 144 vessels in 2000 that participated in West Coast fisheries, 76 of which participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. Recorded data indicates that the number of vessels owned by Fort Bragg residents participating in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (0/0/1), crab (0/5/43), groundfish (0/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), salmon (0/6/60), shellfish (NA/0/NA), shrimp (NA/0/7), and other species (0/0/1).<sup>38</sup>

Twenty-three individuals living in Fort Bragg in 2000 held 24 Federally Managed Groundfish fishery permits. According to recorded data, the number of Fort Bragg residents holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (0/0/6), crab (4/4/48), groundfish (0/0/74), highly migratory species (NA/0/3), other species (3/3/121), salmon (0/5/117), shellfish (0/0/NA), and shrimp (2/0/118).<sup>39</sup>

Fort Bragg fisherman involved in West Coast fisheries held a total of 627 permits in 2000, including 603 registered state permits. Recorded data indicates that the number of permits held by these community members in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (0/0/15), crab (5/4/51), groundfish (0/0/90), highly migratory species (NA/0/9), salmon (0/5/200), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (2/0/27), and other species (4/21/147).<sup>40</sup>

Three fish processors are located in Fort Bragg. Caito Fisheries, the oldest fish processor in Noyo Harbor, has been family-owned for four generations and processes millions of pounds of troll-caught California king salmon, albacore, swordfish, Dungeness crab, sole, flounder, sanddabs, California halibut, sablefish, thornyhead, rockfish, rose fish, lingcod, shark, skate, and octopus annually. The company markets these products at wholesale prices to re-sellers.<sup>41</sup> Ocean Fresh Seafood Products, established in 1985, processes fresh sea urchins predominately for the Japanese market and dominates sea urchin production in Northern California. Because sea urchin processing is labor intensive, the company also employs numerous skilled workers.<sup>42</sup> The Sea Pal Company, established in 1977, produces liquid fish fertilizer by processing ocean fish harvested off the Northern California coast. This plant utilizes fish carcasses salvaged from other processing operations.<sup>43</sup>

### *Sportfishing*

Fort Bragg is a popular destination for numerous sport fishermen, and Noyo Bay hosts several charter boat services that cater to tourists interested in salmon and rock cod fishing and crabbing. According to the California Department of Fish and Game, there are eight sport license vendors in Fort Bragg, five of which are charter boat companies and three of which are chain stores. Fort Bragg is part of the Fort Bragg-Eureka-Crescent City port complex. In 2000, this port complex received 11,574 sport anglers and a total of 49,983 sport fish landings. The top three species landed by sport fishermen fishing near Fort Bragg were rockfishes (81%), Chinook salmon (16%), and lingcod (2%).

Sport fishing businesses based in Fort Bragg in 2003 controlled a total of 103 vessels and sportfish licenses that permitted access to marine species. Of these licenses, 3 were for commercial passenger fishing vessels, 3 were commercial salmon stamps, 3 were for coonstripe shrimp vessels, 26 were for Dungeness crab vessels, 10 were for John Doe salmon, 2 were for northern pink shrimp trawl vessels, and 56 were for salmon vessels.

### *Subsistence*

Specific information on subsistence fishing in Fort Bragg 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*

Some fishermen based in Fort Bragg are also involved in North Pacific fisheries. In 2000, these fishermen owned three vessels that participated in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year community members landed fish in the following North Pacific fisheries (data shown represent landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish (confidential/confidential/1), Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish (confidential/confidential/2), halibut (confidential/confidential/2), and shellfish (confidential/confidential/1).

In 2000 eight Fort Bragg residents worked as crewmembers on vessels in the North Pacific. In the same year, Fort Bragg residents held 18 permits, with 11 individuals holding federal permits and 7 individuals holding state permits. These community members held 4 groundfish License Limitation Program (LLP) permits, 3 Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) BSAI groundfish permits, 2 CFEC halibut permits, and 7 CFEC shellfish permits. Under the individual quota system for the Alaskan halibut and sablefish fisheries, Fort Bragg fishermen were allotted 3,216,683 halibut and 6,470,435 sablefish quota shares in 2000.

### *Sportfishing*

Fishermen based in Fort Bragg controlled 26 sportfishing licenses for North Pacific fisheries in 2000. There were no Fort Bragg residents operating sportfishing guide businesses in Alaska in 2000.

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