

Port Orford, Oregon

People and Place

Location

Port Orford is located on the southwestern Oregon coast at 42°44'59"N and 124°29'53"W. The community lies just south of Cape Blanco, the westernmost point of the contiguous United States. This is also the site of "Battle Rock," a major geographic point of historical interest. Situated 70 miles north of the California border, the city is the smallest of the major cities in Oregon's Curry County. The community was founded within an area of land that juts into the Pacific, and features a south-facing harbor subject to a fair degree of year-round winds, and more severe storms in the winter months. To the east of Port Orford lie some of Oregon's dense old-growth forests, rivers and riparian ecosystems, including the Elk and Sixes Rivers. This small city is situated within some 1.6 square miles of land and water.¹

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Port Orford had a population of 1153. The population has remained fairly constant over recent years, with only minor increases in population seen between 1990 and 2000.² The community was evenly divided between men and women, with 50.4 % of the community male, and 50.6% female. The 2000 U.S. Census totals for Port Orford suggest an older population, with a median age of 50.5 years. The community's median age is relatively high compared to a national median of 35.3.

The 2000 U.S. Census also reports that about 84% of Port Orford residents 18 years old and older had a high school diploma or higher level of education, and some 18% of the total adult populace had obtained a bachelor's or higher level degree. A total of 74% of the residents of Port Orford were living in family households, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Of Port Orford's residents, the 2000 U.S. Census further reports that 93.2% were White, 1.2 % American Indian or Alaskan native, 0.09% Black or African American, 0.03 % Asian, and 0.09% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. A total of 3% identified as Hispanic or Latino. Three percent of Port Orford residents were foreign-born, with 81% of these individuals having been born in Europe or Canada. At 22% of the reporting population, German was the most commonly reported first ancestry for the community. English was indicated as a first ancestry by 13.6% of the community, with 83.2% of Port Orford residents reporting a first ancestry to the 2000 U.S. Census.

History

Prior to European arrival, the Port Orford area was home to the Tututni and Coquille nations, groups who subsisted on coastal and terrestrial resources, including plentiful salmon runs. These groups were Athapaskan speakers, and were at various periods allied and at war with neighboring nations in California and Oregon.

Port Orford takes its European name from the third Earl of Orford, immortalized by Captain Vancouver who explored the Oregon coast and named the nearby Cape Orford in 1792.³ Port Orford's predominant geographical feature is also the site of violence which occurred when the first landing party of European settlers encountered the local Qua-to-mah band of the Tututni nation in 1851. The battle which ensued at "Battle Rock" was reenacted each 4th of July in Port Orford's Jubilee Celebration,⁴ though this has ceased in recent years.

The Native Americans present in the Port Orford area prior to European arrival were caught up in the forcible removal of Indians from coastal Oregon, by order of the U.S. Government in the 1850s. The promise of mining wealth brought non-Indians to Oregon's Rogue River region, and conflicts between settlers and prospectors rapidly developed. Some 24 coastal tribes and bands of western Oregon were moved and assembled in the Siletz Indian reservation in inland Oregon in 1855.

Port Orford was maintained after this initial settlement by Captain William Tichenor in 1851, and is recognized as the oldest townsite on the Oregon coast. The port supported the export of timber products through the latter part of the nineteenth century, though there has been a continuous commercial fishing presence in Port Orford since its founding. Tourism is also becoming an important component of the local economy. Of particular interest to tourists is the annual Arts and Seafood Festival, hosted by the community on Labor Day.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

The contemporary community of Port Orford relies heavily on commercial fishing and tourism for its economic viability, though logging in the surrounding forests has also historically sustained the community. Presently, small business employers provide some employment, including a seafood company and wood products manufacturer. According to the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, in 2000, Curry County was home to only 63 manufacturing companies.

A major feature of the community is the port itself. Port Orford's port is the only true ocean harbor on the Oregon coast, since all other Oregon ports are positioned within riverine areas, thereby protecting moored vessels from inclement weather. Port Orford's harbor offers vessels little protection from frequent windy and stormy conditions, so vessels homeported in the community are hoisted onto dry-dock berths on the port's jetty.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 44.4% of community residents 16 and over were employed that year and 55.6% were not in the labor force. With the military providing no employment in Port Orford, 9% of men and women in the community were employed in agriculture, fishing, and hunting, but this number may not include self-employed fishermen. Similarly, 18.1% of the employed workforce worked in government positions. The unemployment rate, at 3.5%, was low in Port Orford in 2000 (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). An unknown number of Port Orford residents engage in subsistence consumption of fish, since excess catch of various commercial species (crab, salmon, albacore tuna) is frequently distributed in the community among family networks as well as networks of friends and fishermen.

Per capita income in the year 1999 was \$16,442.00, with 17.8 percent of Port Orford residents living below the federally established poverty level. In 2000, there were 656 housing units in the community of Port Orford, with a vacancy rate of 12.56%. Some 33.1% of these housing units were renter occupied, while the remainder was owner occupied.⁵

Governance

The City of Port Orford incorporated in 1935. Six City Council members, an elected Mayor, and a City Administrator support a manager form of civic government. The State of Oregon has no general sales tax. The lodging tax is levied at 1% of the fee charged to the customer for overnight lodging and funds the Oregon Tourism Commission. Property tax is

determined by a permanent rate set for the taxing district. The tax rate ranges from \$7 to \$15 per \$1000 of real market value. Assessed values are limited to a 3 percent annual growth rate.

Fishing businesses located in Oregon or deriving income from Oregon resources must pay a corporate excise or income tax totaling 6% of their net Oregon income. Wholesale fish dealers, canners, and bait dealers pay a landing fee that is determined from a percentage of the value of the food fish purchased from commercial harvesters. Salmon and Steelhead Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) landing fees are \$0.05 per pound for round, \$.0575 per pound for dressed, and \$.0605 per pound for dressed with heads off. Other regular landing fees are based on value; salmon and steelhead are 3.15% of value (including eggs and parts); all other fish and shellfish are 1.09% of value, and near-shore species are 5% of value.

Vessel owners must pay registration and title fees, and marine fuel taxes that support boating facilities, marine law enforcement, and boating safety education. Fishing boats and equipment may be taxed as personal property if they are valued at less than \$1 million. If their value exceeds this amount, they are taxed as industrial property. In 2004, title transfer fees are \$30 and registration fees are \$3 per foot based on center length of vessel. Oregon levies a fuel tax of \$0.24 per gallon of gasoline and use fuel. The Oregon Department of Agriculture administers four commodity commissions, Oregon Albacore Commission, Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission, Oregon Salmon Commission, and Oregon Trawl Commission. Fishermen pay fees to these commissions for marketing and lobbying on behalf of fishermen involved in these specific fisheries.

Port Orford is 148.8 miles from the National Marine Fisheries Service research station in Newport, Oregon, but the headquarters for the state fisheries management agency is slightly further away in Eugene, some 159.6 miles. The community is also 50.9 miles from the nearest U.S. Coast Guard Unit in Coos Bay and 270 miles from the closest U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office in Portland. The closest possible Pacific Fisheries Management Council and North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meetings are 270 miles away in Portland.

Facilities

Port Orford lies on U.S. Highway 101, or the "Oregon Coast Highway." This small city is 270 miles southwest of Portland, Oregon, and 438 miles north of San Francisco, California, cities which both feature major international airports. The nearby Cape Blanco State Airport is a landing base for small planes, as is the larger North Bend Airport, which serves North Bend and Coos Bay.

The Port Orford-Langlois School District features K-12 public school services and the total student body during the 2004-2005 school year was 367, split between two elementary schools and one high school. The nearest venue for higher education is the Southwestern Oregon Community College (SWOC) in Coos Bay. The main electric supply is provided by the Coos Curry Electric Cooperative. Water and sewer services are supplied by the City of Port Orford. Though the Curry County Sheriff's Office is also available, the Port Orford Police Department administers local law enforcement, including two paid officers. The nearest major health care facility to Port Orford is the Curry General Hospital in Gold Beach, some 27 miles away. Port Orford lodging accommodations includes several hotels, motels, and least one bed and breakfast. The community is also served by campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks, as well as vacation rentals.

As mentioned earlier, the Port of Port Orford offers a unique system wherein boats are raised onto trailers located on a large pier, and then moved into their assigned dry-dock locations in order to protect them from the weather. This occurs in lieu of jetties and breakwaters to protect the port. Two cranes are available for the purpose of raising vessels onto the pier, and can accommodate boats up to 44-feet in length. The port is served by two shifts of crane operators. The community's port is also served by a full-time Port Manager and his staff. The unique pier presently accommodates some 35 boats.

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 a total of 85 vessels, all commercially registered, delivered landings to Port Orford. Landings in the community were in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represent landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): crab (207.7 t/\$1,030,389/42), groundfish (262.3 t/\$926,142/68), highly migratory species (4.6 t/\$7,933/4), salmon (39.2 t/\$163,899/39), shrimp (confidential/confidential/1), and other species (267.9 t/\$432,040/50). According to available data on West Coast fish processors, there were no processors operating in Port Orford in 2000.

Forty-five vessels were owned by residents of Port Orford in 2000, twenty of which participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. According to recorded data the number of vessels owned by Port Orford residents in 2000 that participated in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/30/0), groundfish (0/6/0), highly migratory species (0/1/0), salmon (0/38/2), shellfish (NA/1/NA), and shrimp (NA/4/0).⁶

Twelve federal fishing permits were held by 13 Port Orford residents in 2000. Recorded data indicates that the number of community members holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/25/0), groundfish (0/9/0), highly migratory species (NA/1/0), salmon (0/33/4), shellfish (0/1/NA), shrimp (0/4/0), and other species (0/6/0).

There were 171 permits registered to residents of Port Orford, of which 159 were state permits. According to recorded data the number of permits held by these community members in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (0/59/0), groundfish (0/10/0), highly migratory species (NA/1/0), salmon (0/0/6), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (0/8/4), and other species (1/36/0).⁷

Sportfishing

Port Orford provides space for a charter boat fishing operation at its pier. However, the business for which the space was provided is no longer in operation. In the general area of Port Orford, sportfishing activities support surrounding motel businesses, recreational vehicle parks, restaurants, and other businesses. At a site visit by a NOAA team member in 2004, community members suggested that the lack of an east-west corridor helped to explain the relative absence of sportfishing businesses as compared to neighboring communities.

Subsistence

Many local community members engage in subsistence fishing. Both tribal and nontribal fishermen utilize marine and stream resources for subsistence means in Port Orford and the surrounding area. Under the trust doctrine, the federal government is charged to protect tribal resources and by constitutional mandate to protect natural resources. The government-to-government agreements made between tribal groups and the United States through treaties

guarantee fishing rights on traditional grounds. Specific information on subsistence fishing in Port Orford is not discussed in detail in this Community Profile due to the lack of available data.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 a total of three residents of Port Orford worked as crew on fishing vessels that were involved in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year at least one vessel that fished the North Pacific was owned by a community resident.

Sportfishing

In 2000, a total of nine Port Orford residents had purchased licenses to recreationally fish in the North Pacific.

¹ Fact-index.com. No Date. Port Orford, Oregon, [Online]. Available: URL: http://www.fact-index.com/p/po/port_orford__oregon.html (access date - February 2006).

² Gilden, J.1999. Oregon's Changing Coastal Fishing Communities: Appendix B, Oregon Community Summaries: Gold Beach, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://seagrant.oregonstate.edu/sgpubs/onlinepubs/o99001.html#appb> (access date - October 2004).

³ C.A. Smith Real Estate. No Date. Area Information, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.casmith.com/info.htm#anchorhum> (access date - February 2006).

⁴ El.com. 2006. Port Orford, Oregon, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.el.com/to/portorford/> (access date - February 2006).

⁵ State of Oregon. 2006 Economic Community and Development Department, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://info.econ.state.or.us:591/profile.htmH](http://info.econ.state.or.us:591/profile.htmH) (access date - February 2006).

⁶ "NA" refers to data which was not available, for example due to few recorded permit numbers or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.

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