

## **Sisters, Oregon**

### **People and Place**

#### *Location*

The community of Sisters is located in Deschutes County in the high desert of Central Oregon at 44°38'13"N and 124°03'08"W. It is situated at the base of the Three Sisters Mountains, near the Metolious and Deschutes Rivers. The community is 154 miles from the nearest major metropolitan area of Portland. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Sisters encompasses a total area of 1.5 square miles.

#### *Demographic Profile*

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Sisters had a total population of 959 people. This figure represents a 41.2% gross population growth from years 1990 to 2000. The population density was 663 people per square mile of land. About 95.8% of the inhabitants were White, 1.6% Native American, and 0.4% Asian. A total of 1.4% of the population identified with some other race and 0.8% with two or more races groups. Another 4.6% of the population identified themselves as having Hispanic or Latino origins. The net percentage increase of those inhabitants who identified themselves as having Hispanic origins was 3.6%. The 2000 U.S. Census also identified 1.8% of the inhabitants as foreign-born. The non-profit organization, Economic Development for Central Oregon, finds that within a 5-mile radius of Sisters the outlying neighborhoods, acreages, and resorts have an additional 9000 people.<sup>1</sup>

In 2000, Sisters was composed of 49.5% males and 50.5% females. The median age of the community was 38.8 years compared to the national median age of 35.3 years. The 2000 U.S. Census stated that 43.2% of the population 18 years and older received a high school degree as their highest educational attainment compared to the national average of 28.6%. In the community, 87.5% received a high school degree or higher. It is noteworthy that only 17.4% received a bachelor's degree or higher and 5.8% received a graduate degree or higher, while the national averages are 22.3% and 7.8% respectively.

#### *History*

The area presently known as Sisters was first used as a crossroads for Native Americans traveling from the Willamette Valley. Three different societies, who would later make up the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, lived along the Columbia River, the Cascade Mountains, and in parts of southern Oregon before European settlers arrived. The Wasco bands were the farthest east Chinookan-speaking Indians that lived on the Columbia River and were primarily fishermen. They traded bread, salmon meal, and bear grass for other goods from neighboring tribes, such as the Clackamas and the Warm Springs. The Warm Springs band spoke Sahaptin and lived along the Columbia's tributaries. These bands moved between winter and summer villages, depending on salmon and other game, roots, and berries. Both the Wascoes and the Warm Springs built elaborate scaffolding over waterfalls to harvest fish using long-handled dip nets. The Paiutes were much different from the other two bands, living on the high-plains of southeastern Oregon and speaking a Shoshonean dialect. The band migrated far for game and did not rely on fish for their diet. Contact between the Paiutes and the Wasco and Warm Springs bands were infrequent and sometimes erupted in conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Fur trappers and explorers arrived around 1810 and followed the Indian trails that led toward Warm Springs and through the Cascade Mountain passes to the East and the Columbia

River.<sup>3,4</sup> Most early pioneers following the Oregon Trail avoided Central Oregon due to the natural barrier created by the Cascade Mountains.<sup>5</sup> However, by the 1850s, close to 12,000 settlers were moving through Wasco and Warm Springs territories each year. In 1855, Joel Palmer, superintendent, negotiated a treaty with the Warm Springs and Wasco Tribes in which they gave up 10 million acres of land in exchange for exclusive use of the Warm Springs Reservation. In addition, the tribes kept their rights to harvest fish, game, and other foods in their usual and accustomed places, even those that were off the reservation. Thirty-eight Paiutes were moved to the Warm Springs Reservation from the Yakama Reservation in 1879 and more eventually followed. The three tribes accepted the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and in 1937 organized the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon. A year later, they formally accepted a corporate charter from the federal government for their business enterprises.<sup>6</sup> The tribes continue to support the surrounding areas with a number of businesses that provide employment and commerce for local residents of Sisters and other communities, as well as participate in local cultural events and festivals. Many of the foods utilized in the past and methods used to harvest these foods are still an important part of contemporary native life.

In 1859, the first route from the Willamette Valley was discovered and soon new routes were developed that the wagons could follow to the gold mines in eastern Oregon and Idaho. In 1865-66, volunteers from Polk County established Camp Polk, a military base built along Squaw Creek to protect settlers and miners from Indian attacks. The attacks never happened and the camp was abandoned.<sup>7</sup> Samuel M. Hindman homesteaded the site in 1870 and opened up a post office and store. The post office was closed in 1888 and moved to the John Smith General Store where residents submitted entries to name the new establishment. "Sisters" was chosen as the new name, in honor of Faith, Hope, and Charity, the Three Sister Mountains. The community was officially platted in 1901.<sup>8,9</sup>

Community members took advantage of the town's location at the intersection of the Santiam and McKenzie roads. For the next 50 years, Sisters became a supply stop for travelers and sheepmen, as well as the growing lumber and agriculture industries. In 1923-24, the entire town was burned to the ground in two major fires. Despite the economic hardships, the residents stayed and rebuilt the community. The lumber-based town was incorporated in 1946 and the population grew. When lumber production fell, the last mill was closed in 1963 and the population began to decline. In 1969, Brooks Resources Corporation began development on the Black Butte Ranch resort and residential area. The developers offered money to businesses in Sisters to build 1880s western-style storefronts and signs.<sup>10</sup> The town evolved and the 1980s saw the community re-emerge as a tourist town that would eventually become known as the Gateway to the Cascades. The town economy stabilized as its residents capitalized on its beautiful location and it became a resort town and service center to Black Butte Ranch and other residential areas. Today the community is well known for its many unique shops, galleries, and eating establishments, as well as its close proximity to the Metolius and Deschutes Rivers, two of the most sought after fly fishing streams in the Northwest.<sup>11,12</sup>

Tourists are drawn to Sisters year round to participate in numerous festivals and events. The Annual Metolius Bamboo Rod and Fly Fishing Fair is held during the summer and provides opportunities to learn about bamboo fly rods and how to tie flies for fishing nearby streams, as well as experience the work of local Northwest artisans celebrating the Northwest and fly-fishing culture. The Annual Sisters Western and Native American Arts Festival also takes place during the summer months. Participants can experience what life was like for Native Americans and pioneers in the past, as well as demonstrations of contemporary local native culture.

## **Infrastructure**

### *Current Economy*

The major industries in Sisters are tourism, agriculture, and timber.<sup>13</sup> The five largest employers of the area include St. Charles Medical Center, Black Butte Ranch, Bank of the Cascades, Multnomah Publishers, and Ray's Food Place.<sup>14</sup> The 2000 U.S. Census indicates that 4.5% of the employed civilian population 16 years and over worked in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industries. The percentage may not be indicative of the actual number of people in these professions as many are self-employed, especially in the fishing industry. Another 18.8% were employed in retail trade, while 12.3% were in manufacturing. Additionally, 12.3% worked in educational, health and social services and 13.2% were in accommodation and food services. A total of 13.9% of the same population were employed by the government. The 2000 U.S. Census states that the unemployment rate in 2000 was 5.7% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). For the population 16 years and older, 33.5% were not in the labor force, while 62.7% were employed.

In 1999, median household income was \$35,000 and per capita income was \$17,847. According to the Economic Development for Central Oregon, "[t]he town has one of the highest per capita retail spending of any community of Oregon."<sup>15</sup> The 2000 U.S. Census found that 10.4% of the population was living below poverty level in 1999. Of the 482 housing units in 2000, 82.4% were occupied and 17.6% were vacant. Of the occupied housing units, 58.4% were owner occupied, while 41.6% were renter occupied.

### *Governance*

Sisters is an incorporated city that operates under a Council-Manager charter. 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.

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.

The closest National Marine Fisheries Service office is the Newport Research Station, located 158 miles from Sisters. The community is near to the High Desert Region office of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in Bend (22 miles). Sisters is 154 miles from the nearest U.S. Coast Guard Unit and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office, both located in Portland. Pacific and North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meetings are also held in Portland.

### *Facilities*

Sisters is directly accessible by road only. Major highways that intersect the community include U.S. Highway 20 and Highway 126. The closest bus service is in Bend (20 miles), Oregon. The local Sisters Eagle Airport serves as a landing base for small planes. The community is also located approximately 20 miles from Roberts Field at the Redmond Municipal Airport and 167 miles from the Portland International Airport.

Local schools include 1 elementary school, 1 middle school, and 2 high schools; one of the high schools is an alternative school. The Deschutes County Sheriff Department handles local law enforcement. Central Electric Cooperative supplies electricity to area residents. The City of Sisters oversees the water supply and the sewer system, which they are currently developing into a municipal sewer system. The present system has limited the ability of the community to expand and increase development. A municipal sewer system will provide opportunities in manufacturing, office, and light industry.<sup>16</sup> The closest health care facility, St. Charles Medical Center, is 20 miles away in Bend. Sisters lodging accommodations include the Black Butte Ranch, bed-and-breakfasts, condominiums, hotels and motels, campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks, and vacation rentals.

Wizard Falls Fish Hatchery is located on the Metolius River and raises close to 3 million fish, including rainbow, brook, brown, and trophy trout, kokanee, and Atlantic salmon.<sup>17</sup>

## **Involvement in West Coast Fisheries**

### *Commercial Fishing*

Sisters residents did not participate in West Coast fisheries in 2000.

### *Sportfishing*

Sisters had at least four outfitter guide businesses in 2003. Internet fishing guide sources indicate that there is at least one sportfishing business currently operating in the community.<sup>18</sup> At present, Sisters has six sportfishing license vendors. In 2000, the number of licenses sold by active agents was 2242 at a value of \$40,389.

### *Subsistence*

Many local community members engage in subsistence fishing. Both nontribal and tribal fishermen, including members of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, utilize stream resources for subsistence means from the areas within and surrounding Sisters. 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 Sisters 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, three Sisters community members worked as crewmembers aboard vessels involved in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year a total of three community members held registered federal permits. The halibut and sablefish individual fishing quota shares for people residing in the community were 2,121,042 and 1,185,556, respectively.

### *Sportfishing*

Residents purchased 42 sportfishing licenses for Alaskan fisheries in 2000.

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  - <sup>2</sup> The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. 2004. Chronology, [Online]. Available: URL: [http://warmsprings.com/Warmsprings/Tribal\\_Community/History\\_Culture/Chronology/](http://warmsprings.com/Warmsprings/Tribal_Community/History_Culture/Chronology/) (access date - October 2004).
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  - <sup>4</sup> Hatton, R. R. No date. A brief history of Sisters, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sisterschamber.com/history.shtm> (access date - August 2004).
  - <sup>5</sup> Informat Communications. 1995. Sisters history, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.informat.com/places/sisters/history.html> (access date - August 2004).
  - <sup>6</sup> The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. 2004. Chronology, [Online]. Available: URL: [http://warmsprings.com/Warmsprings/Tribal\\_Community/History\\_Culture/Chronology/](http://warmsprings.com/Warmsprings/Tribal_Community/History_Culture/Chronology/) (access date - October.2004).
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  - <sup>10</sup> Informat Communications. 1995. Sisters history, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.informat.com/places/sisters/history.html> (access date - August 2004).
  - <sup>11</sup> Hatton, R. R. No date. A brief history of Sisters, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sisterschamber.com/history.shtm> (access date - August 2004).
  - <sup>12</sup> Sisters Chamber of Commerce. No date. Recreation in Sisters: fly fishing, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sisterschamber.com/recreation.shtm> (access date - August 2004).
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  - <sup>14</sup> Sisters Oregon Guide. 2004. Facts & Figures, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sistersoregonguide.com/stats/facts.html> (access date - August 2004).
  - <sup>15</sup> Economic Development for Central Oregon. 2003. Communities: Sisters, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.edforco.org/communities/sisters/sisters.html> (access date - August 2004).
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  - <sup>17</sup> Weiler, C. No date. Wizard Falls fish hatchery, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sistersoregonguide.com/campsherman/wizardfalls.html> (access date - August 2004).

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<sup>18</sup> Sportfishing businesses determined via internet search: Available: URL: <http://www.fishingnetwork.com> (access date - September 2004).