

Blaine, Washington

People and Place

Location

Blaine is located just south of the international border between the U.S. and Canada, on Drayton Harbor and at the northernmost edge of the Washington State's Puget Sound. The area encompasses 5.5 square miles of land and 3.0 square miles of water in Whatcom County. Blaine lies at 48°59'38''N and 122°44'45''W. At a driving distance of 111 miles from Blaine, Seattle is the nearest major U.S. city.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Blaine was 3770, a significant increase from the population of 2489 recorded ten years earlier. In 2000, the U.S. Census record shows that 51% of Blaine's population was female and 49% was male. The median age of the population was 38.6 years, which is notably above the national average for that year of 35.3 years. The age structure of Blaine demonstrates usual population trends for a community without a major tertiary education provider. A total of 84% of the population lived in family households in 2000.

The majority of the population of Blaine recorded by the 2000 U.S. Census were White (87.7%). Other racial categories with which people identified were Black or African American (1.2%), American Indian and Alaska Native alone (1.1%), Asian alone (4.2%), and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (0.7%). Additionally, a portion of the population identified with some other race alone (1.3%) or with two or more races (3.8%). Of the total population of Blaine in 2000 surveyed by the U.S. Census, 4.4% identified as Hispanic or Latino.

A sample of Blaine's population surveyed by the 2000 U.S. census indicates that 19.3% of the population was foreign-born. The majority of the foreign-born population were from the Americas outside of the United States, followed by a large number of European-born residents. The largest numbers of people denoting ancestry associated themselves with German, English, and Irish backgrounds.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, of the surveyed population 18 years and older in Blaine, 80.6% had a high school education (including equivalency) or higher, 20.7% had earned a Bachelor of Arts degree or higher, and 8.2% had attained a graduate or professional degree. For 28.2% of the surveyed population, a high school degree or equivalent was the highest level of educational attainment.

History

At the time of the first European settlement, over 1000 native people lived in Whatcom County utilizing forest and marine resources to make their living. Whatcom County, meaning "noisy waters," derived its name from the sound of a waterfall at the mouth of Nooksack Creek. Initially known as Semiahmoo, the City of Blaine was already an ambitious settlement by 1858, although it was not incorporated until 1890. The initial name came from the tribe of Salish Indians who inhabited Semiahmoo Bay country at a time when commercial interests attracted proprietors and settlers to the area. Blaine was officially settled in 1856, corresponding with the U.S. Boundary Survey Commission's survey of the 49th parallel. During the falls and winters of 1857 – 1859, soldiers were

stationed in the area to complete the construction of the boundary line. Within a few years, the town had begun to prosper significantly by outfitting gold miners heading north along the Fraser River in British Columbia to join the gold rush in the north. The area hosted Whatcom County's first salmon cannery, built in 1881, which later became the Alaska Packers Association. Reaching a productive peak in the 1950s, the cannery was eventually sold and, indicating the economic changes at the turn of the century, is now the current location of a four-star holiday resort.¹

Prior to this recent stage of the immediate area's history, the Semiahmoo people dominated the region from Boundary Bay to the north and Birch Bay to the South. A 328 acre reservation now runs along the international border. During the mid 1800s Snokomish survivors of devastating smallpox epidemics joined the Semiahmoo, subsequently making the Semiahmoo heirs to the Snokomish territory.² The Semiahmoo belong to a group of tribes called the Straight Salish, a division of the Coast Salish. The Straight Salish are distinguished from their neighbors through their unique language and their most important subsistence practice, reef-net fishing during annual salmon runs. Distinct from smaller mobile nets and traps used for stream fishing by their neighbors to the north and south, Semiahmoo used elaborate reef-nets in salt water channels off the southern shore of Vancouver Island and in the Gulf of the San Juan Islands.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

As elsewhere in Whatcom County, Blaine's economy was historically based on natural resource extraction industries. Agriculture, fishing, and timber have all declined somewhat, but remain strong elements of the local economy. Since 1970, the number of jobs in the county has increased by 275% compared to a statewide increase of 245%, although this trend shows signs of reversing in recent years. The largest proportion of new jobs has been in trade and services, due largely to periods of particularly favorable rates of exchange between U.S. and Canadian currencies. While the annual average income in agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors combined is lower than the statewide salary average, the fishing, hunting, and trapping industry offered the highest average salaries in the county. Only 77 persons participated in the industry.³ According to the 2000 U.S. Census natural resource jobs including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed only a very small percentage of the population. At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census in the city of Blaine, 14.4% of the employed civilian population 16 years of age and over was employed within local, state, or federal governments. The main employment sectors for the employed civilian population 16 years of age and over were "education, health and social services" (15.2%), "retail" (14.3%), and "manufacturing" (11.3%).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census data for the City of Blaine, 54.6% of the potential labor force was employed and there was a 6.9% unemployment rate (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). A total of 41.3% of the population over 16 years of age were not in the labor force as compared to the national average of 36.1% for the same year. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that in 1999 the income of 15.5% of the population was below the poverty level. The median household income in 1999 was \$36,900 and the per capita income was \$20,333.

In 2000 there were a total of 1737 housing units in Blaine, 86% of which were occupied. Of the occupied housing units, 57% were owned and 43% were rented. Of the vacant housing units, 45.6% were for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

Governance

The City of Blaine is organized as a Council-Manager form of government. Under this system, seven elected City Council Members appoint a City Manager. The City Manager is the chief executive officer, and in turn is directly accountable to the Council and responsible for the efficient administration of all city government including appointing heads of city governing departments. Whatcom County, including Blaine, levies an 8.2% sales tax and a 2% hotel/motel tax.

Several taxes directly impact commercial and recreational fishermen. Commercial fishermen operating in Washington waters are subject to the Business and Occupation (B&O) tax under the “extraction” classification (0.48%); those fishing outside of Washington waters but selling fish within Washington are subject to the tax under either the “wholesaling” or “retailing” classifications (0.48% and 0.47% respectively), unless the fish are sold in interstate or foreign commerce.⁴ Those who both catch and sell fish in Washington are eligible for a Multiple Activities Tax Credit (MATC).⁵

Washington State levies a Food, Fish, and Shellfish Tax, paid by the first commercial processor of food fish or shellfish, including: Chinook, coho, and chum salmon or eggs (5.62%); sockeye and pink salmon or eggs (3.37%); oysters (0.09%); sea urchins/cucumbers (4.92%); and shellfish and other food fish or eggs (2.25%). Tuna, mackerel, and jackfish are exempt from this tax. Additionally, there is an Enhanced Food Fish Tax, which applies to the “first possession of enhanced food fish by an owner in Washington State” and is based on the “value of the enhanced food fish at the point of landing.”⁶ The rate of the tax depends upon the species of fish or shellfish.

Vessels used for commercial fishing purposes part-time are subject to an annual Washington State Watercraft Excise Tax levied at 0.5% of the fair market value of the boat. Vessels used for commercial fishing purposes full-time are subject to personal property taxes at the base rate levied by the state. Washington also levies a 10% excise tax on fishing equipment, a three percent tax on electric motors and sonar fish finders, and import duties on tackle and pleasure boats to fund sportfish restoration programs.⁷ Washington State levies a tax of \$0.28 per gallon on motor vehicle fuel. Since most of this tax is used to maintain terrestrial roadways, Washington boaters are entitled to a refund of about \$0.17 per gallon. The difference includes state sales tax and a penny per gallon contribution to a Coastal Protection Fund. Most diesel fuel sold at docks has already had this tax removed.⁸

There is a National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Office located approximately 110 miles south in Seattle. The nearest North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting also takes place in Seattle. There is a Department of Fish and Wildlife office located about 93 miles south in Mill Creek, Washington. The nearest U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is located in Seattle. The U.S. Coast Guard Station (USCG) located 21 miles south in Bellingham was established in 1947 and provides six vessels. The USCG Bellingham Station’s area of responsibility includes the San Juan Islands north to the Canadian border and south to Admiralty Inlet. They work in

close partnership with the Canadian Coast Guard and are occasionally involved in international search and rescue and law enforcement operations.

Facilities

Blaine is accessible by ground, sea, and air. Blaine is located on the Interstate five corridor between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia. The main highways running east-west are Interstate 90, 110 miles south in Seattle and Canadian National 1, approximately 35 miles north in Vancouver. Amtrak's Cascade Corridor Service, servicing the region, provides rail transport between Vancouver, British Columbia and Eugene, Oregon. Blaine Municipal Airport is a small airport with self-service facilities such as fueling and tie-down. Additional nearby airports include Vancouver International Airport in British Columbia and SeaTac International Airport in Sea Tac, Washington.

The Blaine School District provides two primary schools, one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The City of Blaine provides residents with water, sewer, stormwater, and electrical services. Public safety in Blaine is administered by the Blaine Police Department. Whatcom County's only hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital, is located in nearby Bellingham and provides a full range of inpatient and outpatient services. The tourism industry in Blaine is well developed with numerous hotels and motels.

The newly renovated Blaine Harbor has nearly 600 state-of-the-art boat slips for commercial and pleasure boats. The harbor provides year-round permanent moorage, more than 700 feet of visitor moorage, and several marine service facilities including marine supply stores, a fueling dock, portable pump-out stations, and new concrete floats. The harbor also offers a public meeting room, waterfront trails, as well as restaurants and a complimentary shuttle service into town, free parking, and 24-hour staff on site. Blaine Harbor, as a US port of entry, is managed by the nearby Port of Bellingham.

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Recorded data indicates landings in the community were in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): crab (581 t/\$2,637,349/192), groundfish (2026 t/\$1,301,259/26), highly migratory species (confidential/confidential/1), salmon (375 t/\$898,579/177), shellfish (2 t/\$6734/9), shrimp (2 t/\$15,790/9), and other species (174 t/\$462,062/39). Of the 471 unique vessels that delivered landings to Blaine, 236 were commercial vessels, 165 were tribal commercial vessels, and 70 were for personal use.

Blaine residents owned 41 vessels in 2000. In that year, community members owned 22 vessels that participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. Recorded data indicates that the number of vessels owned by Blaine residents participating in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (4/1/0), crab (23/2/0), groundfish (26/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), salmon (30/0/0), shellfish (NA/0/NA), shrimp (NA/0/0), and other species (14/0/0).⁹

In 2000 five Blaine residents held a total of four Federally Managed Groundfish fishery permits. According to recorded data the number of Blaine residents holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (3/1/6), crab

(24/0/0), groundfish (7/0/1), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (46/0/0), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (2/0/0), and other species (2/0/0).¹⁰

According to available data, 271 state and federal permits were registered to Blaine residents in 2000. Recorded data indicates that the number of permits held by community members in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (3/1/141), crab (38/0/0), groundfish (27/0/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (52/0/0), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (2/0/0), and other species (2/0/1).¹¹

There were at least two seafood processors operating in Blaine in 2000, Boundary Fish Company and Sea K. Fish Company. Evidenced by the number of tribal commercial vessels delivering to Blaine cited above, the tribal commercial fishery plays a significant role in the local commercial fishing industry.

The Lummi Natural Resource Department has offices in nearby Bellingham encompassing several divisions including Natural Resource Harvest Management, Shellfish Operations, and Water Resources. The Shellfish Operation provides a sustainable shellfish program through the sale of oyster and clam products using the shellfish hatchery, Lummi Island Sea Pond, and tribal tidelands. According to the Boldt Decision,¹² in addition to several reef net locations (i.e., Orcas, San Juan, Lummi, and Fidalgo Islands, and near Point Roberts and Sandy Point), the usual and accustomed fishing places of the Lummi Indians at treaty times included the marine areas of Northern Puget Sound from the Fraser River south to the northern outskirts of Seattle (as they existed in 1974), and particularly Bellingham Bay. Freshwater fisheries included the river drainage systems, especially the Nooksack, emptying into the bays from Boundary Bay south to Fidalgo Bay.

Sportfishing

In 2000 there was at least one salmonid charter fishing operator in Blaine. As of May 2005, two licensed agents are selling fishing permits in Blaine. In Blaine in 2003 there were 5,332 sportfishing license transactions valuing \$ 66,342.58. In Catch Record Card Area 7 (San Juan Islands) the 2000 sport salmon catch, based on catch record cards, was 7178, including: 4495 Chinook, 2644 coho, 21 chum, and 18 sockeye. In 2000 there were approximately 30,627 marine angler trips in the sport salmon fishery. In the same year a total of 5897 bottomfish were caught by boat-based anglers Area 7. The recreational harvest of clams (lbs) and oysters (#) for the same area in 2000 was estimated to be 115,273 and 0 respectively; harvest occurred over an estimated 19,752 user trips.

Subsistence

Subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering activities are fundamental to the way of life of some coastal community members. Both tribal and nontribal individuals participate in subsistence fishing. Today, members of the Lummi Tribe and other nontribal subsistence fishermen obtain fishery resources from the waters surrounding Blaine. Subsistence fishing is not discussed in great detail in this Community Profile due to the lack of available data.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 Blaine residents owned 22 vessels that were involved in the North Pacific fisheries. In the same year community members landed fish in the following North Pacific fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish (confidential/confidential/1), other finfish (confidential/confidential/2), Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish (2,513 mt/\$898,440/4), halibut (confidential/confidential/2), herring (confidential/confidential/1), salmon (3,621 mt/\$1,709,500/18), and shellfish (confidential/confidential/2).

In 2000 64 Blaine residents served as crewmembers in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year 12 community residents held registered state permits and 30 held registered federal permits.

A total of 50 state and federal permits were registered to individuals in Blaine in 2000. In the same year residents of Blaine held five groundfish License Limitation Program permits. Blaine residents held six BSAI groundfish, four halibut, five herring, 26 salmon, and two shellfish Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission permits in 2000. The halibut individual fishing quota shares for people residing in the community were 273,967.

Sportfishing

A total of 54 Alaska sportfishing licenses were sold to Blaine community members in 2000. In the same year there was one sportfishing business in Blaine that participated in Alaskan fisheries.

¹ History of Blaine. No date. City of Blaine, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.ci.blaine.wa.us/> (access date - October 2004).

² The Territory of the Semiahmoo People. No date. The Semiahmoo Index, [Online]. Available: <http://members.shaw.ca/j.a.brown/Territory.html> (access date - October 2004).

³ Whatcom County Profile. 2001. Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch, Employment Security Department, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.wa.gov/esd/lmea/pubs/profiles/whatcom.pdf> (access date - March 2005).

⁴ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2004. Commercial fishing, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://dor.wa.gov/content/taxes/Industry/Fish/default.aspx> (access date - July 2004).

⁵ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2002. Information on Washington's Tax Structure: Fish Taxes, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://dor.wa.gov/content/taxes/industry/fish/default.aspx> (access date - July 2004).

⁶ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2001. Commercial Fishing, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://dor.wa.gov/content/taxes/Industry/Fish/default.aspx#enhanced> (access date - July 2004).

⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures. 2004. Environment, Energy, and Transportation Program: Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/esnr/FISHHUNTWILD.htm> (access date - July 2004).

⁸ Washington State Department of Licensing. 2003. Fuel Tax Frequently Asked Questions, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.dol.wa.gov/vs/ft-faq.htm> (access date - July 2004).

⁹ '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.

¹⁰ '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.

¹¹ '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.

¹² Center for Columbia River History. No date. Boldt Decision, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.ccrh.org/comm/river/legal/boldt.htm> (access date - October 2004).