

Chinook, Washington

People and Place

Location

Chinook is located in Southwestern Washington at 46°16'23"N and 123°56'39"W.¹ The community is situated on Baker Bay and the north shore of the Columbia River. Baker Bay, which covers an area about 15 square miles, is separated from the river by a low-lying sand bar known as Sand Island. Nearby Cape Disappointment forms the northern portion of the mouth of the Columbia as it flows into the Pacific Ocean. Chinook shares Baker Bay with the larger City of Ilwaco, located about 7 miles to the northwest. Astoria, Oregon, lies about 10 miles to the southeast on the opposite side of the Columbia. The nearest major metropolitan area is Portland, Oregon, which lies approximately 100 miles to the southeast, and Seattle, Washington, is located 173 miles to the northeast. Chinook occupies a land area of 1.02 square miles.²

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Chinook had a population of 457. The community displayed a relatively even gender balance, with 49% male and 51% female residents. The age structure of Chinook reveals an older population with 67.8% of residents 35 or over and only 10.7% of residents 19 and under, compared to 50.5% and 20.9%, respectively, for the U.S. population. The median age for both sexes in Chinook was 47.6, almost 12 years older than the national median age of 35.3.

The racial composition of Chinook was relatively homogenous in 2000. According to the U.S. Census, 96.5% of residents identified themselves as White, 0.9% as American Indian or Alaskan Native and 0.7% as Asian. A total of 0.2% of the population identified as some other race, and 1.8% with two or more races. Only 2% of Chinook residents indicated Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity.

A total of 87% of residents reported their ancestry on the 2000 U.S. Census. Of these residents, 52.3% identified with a single ancestry and 47.7% with multiple ancestries. The top three First Ancestry categories reported were German (21.2%), Irish (14.9%), and European (9.1%). Of the total population of Chinook, 5.3% indicated on the census that they were foreign-born. Of these foreign-born residents, 77.3% were Canadian and 22.7% were French.

Chinook's population in 2000 lived in 210 households, with 82.7% of residents living in family households. About 74.6% of Chinook residents 18 and over had a high school diploma/equivalency or higher, 19.1% had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 10.0% had completed a graduate or professional degree. The highest level of educational attainment for 25.1% of residents was a high school degree. Because Chinook was not recognized as a place on the 1990 U.S. Census, data indicating patterns of demographic evolution are not available.

History

The community of Chinook derives its name from native peoples inhabiting the area near the mouth of the Columbia River. The Chinook Indians were historically a group of linguistically related peoples whose territory included the lower Columbia River in Washington and Oregon south of The Dalles.³ These native groups depended heavily on fishing and coastal resources and developed extensive trade networks within the region. The "Lower Chinook," who dominated the vicinity of today's community of Chinook, traded heavily with British and American companies and hosted Lewis and Clark in 1805 as they neared the Pacific Ocean. Lewis and

Clark estimated the local population of Chinook Indians at around 400 in 1805, but disease and rapid White settlement soon devastated the native population in the area.

In the 1850s, the Town of Chinookville was established at the site of a long-standing Chinook Indian village on the Columbia River by nonnative settlers interested in the prospects for trade and fishing in the area. Chinookville became the County Seat of Pacific County from 1852-1854, and the county's first salmon cannery was established at the site in 1870. During the 1880's, erosion along the Columbia River marked the beginning of the end for Chinookville as homes and businesses were destroyed in large numbers. The community soon became a ghost town and disappeared completely due to erosion during this century.⁴

As Chinookville eroded into obscurity, the contemporary community of Chinook was established to the southwest along Baker Bay, a location which drew residents interested in the region's lucrative fishing industry. Initial land claims in the vicinity were purchased in the 1860s, but the community did not flourish until the 1880s when the first fish traps were sunk in Baker Bay. According to legend, the salmon fishing boom that followed temporarily made Chinook the richest town per capita in the United States.⁵ Many of the community's buildings and homes were built near the turn of the century with wealth derived from this initial fishing boom. Baker Bay is also dotted with rotting pilings that are the remains of now-abandoned salmon traps from this earlier period of immense fishing success.

Although salmon fishing no longer generates the wealth that it once did, Chinook still relies heavily on fishing, and community members clearly identify with their participation in the industry. Each June, the community hosts the Chinook Sturgeon Derby, which showcases area fisherman competing to catch the largest number of sturgeon. Most local jobs are also linked to fishing. The Port of Chinook, the smallest of three ports in the area, provides 300 boat slips, and the community hosts a crab processing plant operated by Bell Buoy Crab Company.

Contemporary Chinook residents often struggle to maintain the economic viability of the local fishing industry as nearby towns compete to attract sport and commercial fishing revenue and related businesses. In 2003, the community faced a potential economic disaster when the Port of Chinook, was designated as a "low-use port" for which dredging would no longer be provided.^{6,7} The port suffered from severe silt build-up, such that fisherman could only access it at extremely high tides, and depths were as low as 4 feet in some areas. Area businesses and fisherman lobbied legislators to reverse the decision not to dredge, and eventually won support and funding within the U.S. Congress. In September 2004, about 80,000 cubic yards of material were removed from the Columbia River between Chinook and the Head of Sand Island.

Chinook is also the site of a different sort of political struggle. The contemporary Chinook Nation, a tribal organization that represents individuals descended from the historic family of Chinook groups, maintains its main office here. In 2001, the Tribe was tentatively granted federal recognition after 20 years of appeals. The Bureau of Indian Affairs then rescinded federal recognition in 2002 on the grounds that the Tribe did not satisfy the mandated seven criteria required for recognition. The Tribe has appealed this reversal, and, at the time of this writing, state and federal documents still noted that federal recognition is "pending."^{8,9,10} Chinook tribal members argue that federal recognition is needed to help restore and safeguard the traditional fishing and land rights needed to maintain native identities and sustain tribal members economically.¹¹

Infrastructure

Current Economy

The contemporary community of Chinook continues to rely heavily on commercial fishing and tourism associated with sportfishing, coastal recreation, and nearby Fort Columbia State Park (established at the site of a military installation built in 1896 to defend the mouth of the Columbia River). The Bell Buoy Crab Company, with total annual sales of \$7 million (2 million lbs of crab), is also a critical employer and the second largest crab processor in Washington State. It is estimated that the decision to dredge the Port of Chinook prevented the loss of 50 full-time and 100 seasonal jobs at the Bell Buoy Crab Company, 350 jobs associated with businesses that rely on the port, and an estimated \$2.9 million in direct economic impacts from the average 10,000 boat trips into the port.¹²

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 53.6% of the population 16 and older was employed and another 55.4% did not participate in the labor force (were not actively seeking work). Chinook therefore displayed a 3.3% unemployment rate (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force), which compared favorably to the national unemployment rate of 5.7%.

Approximately 9.6% of the employed civilian population 16 years and over worked for the state or federal government in 2000. Only about 3.6% indicated that they worked in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting, but this percentage may be artificially low given that many fishermen are self-employed and are underrepresented in these data. About 25.1% of residents were employed in education, health, and social services, 15.6% in retail trade, 13.8% in construction. About 3.3% of the population 16 years or older was employed by the military.

According to the U.S. Census, the per capita income in Chinook was about \$17,198 in 1999, compared to a national per capita income of \$21,587. In the same year the median household income in Chinook was about \$30,417, compared to a national median household income of \$41,994. Approximately 18.2% of residents were living below the poverty level in 1999, a value in excess of the national poverty level of about 12.4%.

There were 263 housing units in Chinook in 2000, all of which were classified as rural. Approximately 20.2% of these units were vacant at the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, but 81.1% of these vacant units were intended for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. About 77.1% of occupied housing units were owner-occupied, compared to 66.2% ownership for occupied housing units in the U.S. overall.

Governance

Under Washington State law, an area cannot be incorporated as a city unless it houses a minimum of 1500 residents. Chinook is therefore classified as an unincorporated area governed by Pacific County. Chinook has neither a City Council nor its own separate municipal tax structure. Chinook residents elect county officials, whose offices are located in the County Seat of South Bend, approximately 44 miles north along U.S.-101. Pacific County, which was organized in 1851, has a 7.8% sales tax and a 9.8% hotel/lodging tax.^{13,14}

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.¹⁵ Those who both catch and sell fish in Washington are eligible for a Multiple Activities Tax Credit (MATC).¹⁶

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.”¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

Chinook lies within the jurisdiction of the Pacific Fisheries Management Council and is approximately 100 driving miles from Council meetings in Portland, 171 miles from Seattle, 730 miles from San Francisco, and 1079 miles from San Diego.²⁰ The nearest U.S. Coast Guard Group and Air Station is located in Warrenton, Oregon (16 miles), and the Coast Guard operates the National Motor Lifeboat School (NMLB) in Ilwaco, Washington (7 miles).²¹ Chinook is under the jurisdiction of the NMFS Northwest Regional Office located in Seattle and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Southwest Regional Office in Vancouver, Washington (98 miles).

Facilities

Chinook lies along U.S. Highway 101, which runs the length of the Pacific Coast from Seattle, Washington, to Los Angeles, California. Because Chinook is small, residents must travel to nearby Ilwaco, Washington (7 miles), Long Beach, Washington (9 miles), and Astoria, Oregon (10 miles), to access major retail stores and other amenities. The nearest major international airport is located in Portland, Oregon (100 miles), and the closer Port of Ilwaco Airport provides an unattended paved runaway that is open to the public. There are several campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks located in Chinook, but the nearest hotels and motels are located in Ilwaco and Long Beach.

Chinook lies within the Ocean Beach School District, but there are no public schools located in the community itself.²² Students travel by bus to schools in Ilwaco and Long Beach. In addition to traditional elementary, middle, and high schools, the District also offers a small alternative high school in Long Beach.

The Chinook Water District draws the community’s water supply from a reservoir created by a 26-foot earthen dam on a portion of the Columbia River.²³ Because Chinook is not served by a sewer district, residents rely on septic systems. Electricity is provided by Public Utility District No. 2 of Pacific County, Washington. The closest major health care facilities are Ocean Beach Hospital in Ilwaco, Washington, Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, Oregon, and Willapa Harbor Hospital in South Bend, Washington. Law enforcement services are

administered by the Pacific County Sheriff's Office. Chinook has a volunteer fire department and is formally served by Pacific County Fire District #2, Chinook Valley (located in Chinook).

The Port of Chinook has 300 boat slips, a boat launch ramp, and a boat hoist, all of which can accommodate vessels ranging from 16 to 60 feet.²⁴ The Port also features a fueling facility and power and water hook-ups on some docks. The nearby Port of Iwalco supports a larger number of boats and is used much more heavily.

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Landings data for Chinook were recorded as part of the Ilwaco/Chinook Port Group which includes the nearby communities of Skamokawa and Ilwaco. The majority of vessels based in Chinook participate in West Coast fisheries. In 2000, a total of 338 unique vessels, 40 of which were personal vessels and 298 of which were commercial vessels, delivered landings to Ilwaco. Reported landings for this port group in 2000 were in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represent landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): coastal pelagic (confidential/confidential/2), crab (861.9 t/\$3,864,427/104), groundfish (2350.7 t/\$634,261/35), highly migratory species (1907.1 t/\$3,595,659/119), salmon (184.7 t/\$468,717/98), shrimp (confidential/confidential/2), and other species (1907.1 t/\$183,071/81). See the Ilwaco Community Profile for additional information about this community.

According to the manager of the Port of Chinook, this facility alone supports 35 commercial vessels and harbors 265 sport vessels throughout the fishing season. In 2003, more than 4000 recreational vehicles utilized the Port of Chinook's boat ramp.²⁵ The major commercial species landed at the Port of Chinook include crab, tuna, and salmon, but no landings data specific to this port are available.

Chinook residents owned 29 vessels in 2000 that participated in West Coast fisheries, including 14 that participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. According to recorded data the number of vessels owned by Chinook residents that landed fish in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (12/3/0), groundfish (1/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), salmon (13/3/0), shellfish (NA/0/NA), shrimp (NA/0/0), and other species (3/0/0).²⁶

One individual living in Chinook in 2000 held a federal groundfish fishery permit. According to recorded data the number of Chinook residents that held permits in each said state fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (11/4/0); highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (13/3/1), shellfish (6/0/NA), shrimp (0/2/0), and other species (3/0/0).²⁷

Chinook fisherman involved in the West Coast fisheries held a total of 41 permits in 2000, two of which were federal permits. According to available data, 39 state permits were registered to Chinook residents in 2000. Recorded data indicates that the number of permits held by these community members in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (18/0/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (15/0/2), shellfish (0/0/NA), and other species (4/0/0).²⁸

The Bell Buoy Crab Company operates a crab processing plant in Chinook. This facility is the second largest crab processor in Washington State, and the company boasts sales of \$7 million (2 million lbs of crab) per year. Fifty full-time and 100 seasonal jobs are also linked to this facility.²⁹ The Bell Buoy Crab Company is also a tuna receiver, but these fish are processed elsewhere.³⁰

Sportfishing

Nearby cities on the Pacific Coast attract a larger number of sport fishermen, but those looking for a smaller port or fewer tourists may choose the Port of Chinook. Two sportfishing license vendors operate in the community of Chinook. In 2003, more than 4000 recreational boaters used the ramp at the Port of Chinook and an estimated 295 sportfishing vessels use the port each fishing season.³¹ According to state records, there were no Chinook residents that owned or operated charter boats in Washington State in 2003 or 2004.

The closest Catch Record Card Areas to Chinook are Area 1 (Ilwaco) and 1A (Ilwaco – Buoy 10). The 2000-2001 sport salmon catch in these areas was 27,889 (1) and 16,335 (1A) respectively. This data includes (1/1A): Chinook (1630/2972) and coho (26,259/13,363). These figures are based on creel survey estimates. In the same year there were approximately 16,243 (1) and 42,061(1A) marine angler trips in the sport salmon fishery. In the same period there were 106 steelhead caught by sport fishermen in Area 1 (Columbia River – Leadbetter Point). In 2000 the coastal bottomfish catch was 8388 for Marine Area 1 (Ilwaco) and 631 for the Ilwaco Jetty.

Subsistence

Members of the Chinook Nation remain heavily involved in subsistence fishing in the area, but, because the Tribe does not have federal recognition, members have no formal fishing rights within the region. In the past, military intervention has been used to stop native fishermen from using traditional fishing grounds without permits. No specific data on native subsistence fishing is available because of its controversial nature, but tribal members maintain that fishing remains central to Chinook identities and livelihoods. The restoration of traditional fishing rights is one of the driving forces behind continuing efforts to establish federal recognition for the Tribe.³²

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Thirteen vessels based in Chinook participated in North Pacific fisheries in 2000. 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 vessel landing): other finfish (confidential/confidential/1), herring (confidential/confidential/3), and salmon (238.3 t/\$357,610/11).

Sixteen Chinook residents worked as crewmembers on vessels involved in North Pacific fisheries in 2000. Fishermen from Chinook held 17 North Pacific permits, with six individuals holding federal permits and 13 individuals holding state permits. These Chinook residents held 3 groundfish License Limitation Program (LLP) permits, 3 Commercial Fisheries Entry Program (CFEC) herring permits, and 11 CFEC salmon permits. Under the individual quota system for the Alaskan halibut and sablefish fisheries, Chinook fishermen were allotted 1,390,684 halibut quota shares and 1,208,136 sablefish shares in 2000.

Sportfishing

According to state records, Chinook residents purchased a total of 10 sportfishing licenses for North Pacific fisheries in 2000.

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- ²⁷ '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.
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