

Lopez Island, Washington

People and Place

Location

Lopez Island is the first stop made by the Washington State Ferries among the San Juan Islands. The Islands are located in the northwest corner of the state along the U.S.-Canada international border. The island is 15 miles long and eight miles wide. Lopez Island is located approximately 50 miles west of Victoria, British Columbia, and 100 miles north of Seattle, Washington. Lopez Island is located at 48°28'44"N, 122°53'30"W.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census the population of Lopez Island was 2179. In the same year the percentage of males and females was 50.1% and 49.9% respectively. The racial composition of the population in 2000 was predominantly White (95.1%), followed by American Indian and Alaska Native (1.3%), Asian (0.8%), and Black or African American (0.1%). Only one individual identified themselves as a Pacific Islander in 2000. Few individuals (0.4 %) classified themselves as belonging to some other race. Overall, 2.2% of the population identified themselves as belonging to two or more races. Less than five percent of the population (2.7%) identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino.

The median age of the population in 2000 was 48.9, which was higher than the national median of 35.3 for the same year. In 2000 30% of the population was between the ages of 45 and 60. A small percentage (6.2%) of the population were foreign-born; of the foreign-born population 19% were born in Canada and 16.2% in Columbia. Approximately 80.4% of the population of Lopez Island was living in family households in 2000. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that 76.6% of the population over 18 years of age had received a high school degree or higher, 37.2% had received a Bachelor's degree or higher, and 14.3% received a graduate or professional degree; as compared to the national averages of 79.7%, 22.3%, and 7.8% respectively.

History

The earliest inhabitants of the San Juan Islands were primarily Indians of the Lummi and Samish nations. British and Spanish explorers discovered the islands in the 18th century but White settlers did not arrive until the 1850s. Lopez Island was named after Lopez Gonzales de Haro, the Spanish captain who discovered the islands in the late 1700s. Among the first White settlers in the area were British sailors who jumped ship to stake claim to the agriculturally rich land of Lopez Island. The sailors typically married native women and settled down to farming and fishing.¹ Beginning in the mid to late 19th century the island was also settled by Scandinavian fishermen, British trappers and sheepherders, and Americans returning from gold explorations in Canada.² The island's gentle topography encouraged agriculture and when White settlers began to arrive in the San Juans in the 1850s many chose to establish homes on Lopez. Historically, as a whole, the islands have been populated by hard-working farmers, fishermen, seafarers, and others.³

James and Amelia Davis were the first white couple to settle on Lopez. Their land was originally claimed under British patent by Samuel Clark Davis, James' older brother, around 1854. The land claim stretched from Richardson along Davis Bay almost to Shark Reef., on the southwestern side of the island. James Earnest Davis, the son of James and Amelia, and his wife

Maybell Troxell Davis built a large farmhouse in 1913. Family legend says it was paid for by a single successful season on a fish trap off the south end of the island. While many of James and Amelia's children went to sea, James Earnest worked the fish traps during the salmon runs on Lopez. John Troxell, James Earnest's brother-in-law, was the most famous of the local "fish trap men." Fish traps appeared on the islands in the 1890s and were the easiest and most popular method of taking salmon until they were banned by the State in 1934.⁴

The waters around the San Juan Islands are extremely popular with boaters from both the U.S. and Canada. Also because of their strategic location, they have proven attractive to smugglers and rum-runners transporting illegal aliens, drugs, wool, liquor, and other commodities.⁵ However these traditional occupations became less profitable in the 1970s and the tourism industry began to prosper in the islands. Lopez Island, which is relatively flat compared to the other islands, is popular among bicyclists. The main village, located on the center of the western coast, has several shops, an inn, and other professional services. Unlike most of the other islands, several profitable working farms still operate on Lopez Island.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, 18% of the employed civilian population 16 years of age and over was employed within local, state, or federal governments for industries other than agriculture, fishing, forestry, and hunting. The majority of Lopez Island's employed civilian population 16 years of age and over (21.7%) was employed in "education, health, and social services." Slightly less (16.8% and 16.0%) were employed in "construction" and "arts, entertainment, recreation and accommodation" respectively. According to the 2000 U.S. Census natural resource jobs including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed 3.3% of the population.

According to 2000 U.S. Census data 54.1% of the potential labor force was employed and there was a 4.2% unemployment rate (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). A total of 43.5% of the population over 16 years of age were not in the labor force in 2000 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 10.2% of the population was below the poverty level. The median household income in 1999 was \$38,594 and the per capita income was \$26,789.

In 2000 there were 1775 housing units on Lopez Island. The percentages of occupied housing units that were owner versus renter occupied were 79.1% and 20.9% respectively. Approximately 42% percent of the housing units were vacant, of which 91.2% were vacant due to seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

Governance

Friday Harbor, on San Juan Island, is the only incorporated community in San Juan County. The County is governed by the Board of County Commissioners. Three district commissioners are elected for staggered three-year terms; Lopez Island falls in District 3. San Juan County, including Lopez Island, levies a 7.7% 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.⁶ Those who both catch and sell fish in Washington are eligible for a Multiple Activities Tax Credit (MATC).⁷

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.”⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

There is a National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Office located approximately 105 miles to the southeast in Seattle. The nearest North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting also takes place in Seattle. There is a Department of Fish and Game office located about 85 miles southeast in Mill Creek, Washington. The nearest U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is located in Seattle. Lopez Island falls within the Bellingham U.S. Coast Guard Station’s area of responsibility which includes the San Juan Islands north to the Canadian border and south to Admiralty Inlet. The Bellingham Station was established in 1947 and provides six vessels.

Facilities

Lopez Island is accessible by sea and air. The Washington State Ferry (WSF) services Lopez Island with over 15 boats arriving from the City of Anacortes daily. Additionally the WSF provides numerous trips daily between Lopez and the other islands in San Juan County. Friday Harbor, the San Juan Island county seat, is located a half hour from Lopez Island by WSF. Friday Harbor is accessible by air from Anacortes and Seattle via Kenmore Air, San Juan Airlines, and West Isle Air. The closest airport offering international service outside of Canada is SeaTac International Airport located approximately 125 miles south of the San Juan Islands in Sea Tac, Washington.

The Lopez Children Center offers early learning and childcare to children 30 months to 6 years of age and Lopez Island School District provides K-12 education to Island residents. Skagit Valley College’s San Juan Center, located in Friday Harbor on San Juan Island, offers Associate of Arts degrees.

Orcas Power and Light services residents of Lopez Island and the Lopez Transfer Station is in charge of waste management for the Island. Ground water provides most of the drinking water in the San Juan Islands, though productive sand and gravel aquifers exist on Lopez Island.

Public safety on Lopez Island is provided by the San Juan County Sheriff. Lopez Island Medical Clinic of Island Hospital offers medical care on Lopez Island.

Lopez Island boasts numerous community events and services. The Island hosts the Lopez 4th of July Parade, Salmon Barbeque, and Fireworks. A new tradition was started in 2003, the Lopez Winter Celebration, with community residents gathering in the village with food, caroling, and the lighting of the village lights. Lopez Island organizations include: the Lopez Artist Guild, the Lopez Center for Community and the Arts, the Lopez Community Land Trust, the Lopez Island Community Chamber of Commerce, the Lopez Island Family Resource Center, the Lopez Island Historical Museum, Lopez Island Hospice and Home Support, the Lopez Island Library, the Lopez Lions Club, the Lopez Senior Center, and the San Juan Islands Preservation Trust. Tourism is important to the Lopez Island Economy; the Island boasts four bed and breakfasts, 12 private lodging establishments (i.e., cabins, cottages, etc.), one resort, and three camping facilities. The Island is also home to 11 restaurants and the Lopez Island Vineyards and Winery.

The Island is home to several marine facilities including two county docks, Hunter Bay and Mackaye Harbor. The Islands Marine Center (IMC), a full service marina featuring 100 slips, provides a service and sales department and a chandlery. The Lopez Islander Lodge and Marina also offers overnight guest and restaurant moorage. The IMC and the Lodge are both located on the western side of Lopez Island at Fisherman Bay. Other marine services include Tanbark Marine, offering full yacht management services. Tanbark, located at Spencer's Landing Marina, has provided mechanical, electrical, and desalination systems installation and services for over 20 years.

The San Juan County marine resource committee (MRC), a Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Initiative, is currently working on three projects in the San Juan Islands: 1) Marine Stewardship Area, 2) Bottomfish Recovery Program, and 3) Forage Fish Habitat Restoration Community. The purpose of the MRC is to bring a scientific and grassroots approach to protecting and restoring marine resources in the area. Serving on the MRC are representatives from the scientific community, local and tribal governments, and economic, recreational, and conservation interests.

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

According to available data there were zero seafood processors operating on Lopez Island in 2000. In the same year there were also no vessels making landings on Lopez Island. Lopez Island residents owned 11 vessels in 2000. Community members owned six vessels that participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. Recorded data indicates that the number of vessels owned by Lopez Island residents participating in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (0/0/0), crab (2/0/1), groundfish (3/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), salmon (4/0/0), shellfish (NA/0/NA), shrimp (NA/0/0), and other species (4/0/0).¹¹

Two Lopez Island residents held a total of three Federally Managed Groundfish fishery permits in 2000. In the same year recorded data indicates that the number of Lopez Island residents holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic (0/0/0), crab (1/1/1), groundfish (2/0/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (16/0/0), shellfish (0/0/NA), shrimp (0/0/0), and other species (6/0/0).¹²

According to available data 35 state and federal permits were registered to Lopez Island 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 (0/0/0), crab (3/0/1), groundfish (5/0/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (16/0/0), shellfish (0/0/NA), and other species (7/0/0).¹³

Several tribal groups are active in commercial and subsistence fishing in waters surrounding the San Juan Islands. Of the twenty-eight federally recognized tribes in Washington State, eight of the Boldt case area tribes have usual and accustomed fishing areas that include part or all of San Juan County.¹⁴

Sportfishing

Available data indicates that there were zero charter fishing operators on Lopez Island in 2000. There is one licensed agent selling fishing permits on Lopez Island. In 2003 there were 1643 sportfishing license transactions valuing \$22,103 on Lopez Island. 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 in Puget Sound within 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. Today, tribal members and other nontribal subsistence fishermen obtain fishery resources from the waters surrounding Lopez Island. While tribal and nontribal individuals participate in subsistence fishing, tribal catches are reserved for tribal use only. 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 Lopez Island residents owned eight vessels that were involved in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year recorded data indicates that 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): other finfish (confidential/confidential/1), Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish (confidential/confidential/1), and salmon (352 t/\$273,000/4).

In 2000 21 Lopez Island residents served as crewmembers in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year five community residents held registered state permits and two held registered federal permits.

A total of nine state and federal permits were registered to individuals on Lopez Island in 2000. In the same year residents of Lopez Island held two groundfish License Limitation Program permits. Lopez Island residents held 1 GOA groundfish, 1 Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, and 4 salmon Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission permits in 2000. Lopez Island residents held zero halibut and sablefish individual fishing quota shares in the same year.

Sportfishing

While the majority of the charter boats generally target West Coast fisheries, 26 Alaska sportfishing licenses were purchased by Lopez Island community members in 2000. In the same year there were no sportfishing businesses on Lopez Island that participated in Alaskan fisheries.

¹ Lopez Island Historical Museum. No date. Description, [Online]. Available: URL: http://sanjuanislands.kulshan.com/Washington/San_Juan/Lopez_Village/Attractions/Lopez_Island_Historical_Museum.htm (access date - February 2005).

² LopezIsland.net. No date. The History of the San Juan Islands, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.lopezisland.net/history.html> (access date - February 2005).

³ San Juans Island Guide. No date. Lopez Island History, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sanjuanislandsguide.com/history/lopez.htm> (access date - February 2005).

⁴ The Lopez Island Historical Society and Museum. 2004. James Davis Home, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.rockisland.com/~lopezmuseum/homes/davis.html> (access date - February 2005).

⁵ LopezIsland.net. No date. The History of the San Juan Islands, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.lopezisland.net/history.html> (access date - February 2005).

⁶ 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).

⁷ 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).

⁸ 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).

⁹ 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).

¹⁰ 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).

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 '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.

¹³ '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.

¹⁴ San Juan Islander. 2005. Minutes from the November 21st, 2001 meeting, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.sanjuanislander.com/county/mrc/11-21-01.html> (access date - March 2005).