

National Overview



THEY THAT GO
DOWN TO THE SEA
IN SHIPS

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U.S. Summary

Overview of the Report

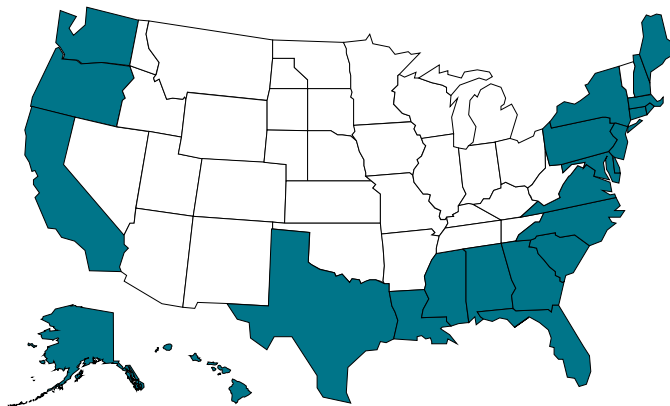
This report presents descriptive demographic data on a subset of the Nation's fishing communities and ports for each of the Nation's coastal states, as well as descriptive geographic and other social indicator data for the states where these communities are located. The communities all have one feature in common: they participate in some aspect of commercial fishing. They were selected by experts in each region primarily because they had the highest landings volume in pounds in their state for 2006. By placing these community and state data snapshots side by side, we can compare the communities and the states where they are located to identify their similarities and differences. Identifying patterned similarities and differences among the Nation's fishing communities within and between regions is one of the steps in developing scientific understanding of how fishing communities are integrated into larger regional ecologies. Fisheries ecosystem-based management recognizes that human sociocultural and economic systems interact with marine ecosystems in profound ways. Additionally, these are some of the data used to assess how different kinds of communities in particular states and regions are impacted by fisheries management actions.

The National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS or NOAA Fisheries) divides the United States' twenty-four coastal states and its four territories and Puerto Rico among six distinct regions: the Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Northwest, Alaska, and the Pacific Islands. Each region has responsibility for conducting relevant fisheries-related scientific research in support of the agency's mandated mission to conserve and manage the Nation's living marine resources under the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (P.L. 94-265, as amended by P.L. 109-479).

These six NMFS regions are included in or overlap eight Fishery Management Council regions: New England, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, Pacific, North Pacific, and the Western Pacific. Fishery Management Councils (FMCs) are responsible for creating fisheries management plans with the advice of scientific advisory committees and others. The management plans must be approved by the Secretary of Commerce before they go into effect.

This report is divided into eight sections: a National Overview and regional overviews for the North Pacific, Pacific, Western Pacific, New England, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico regions. All twenty-three coastal states are included in one of these seven regions.¹

¹Pennsylvania is not included in this report. Florida is included for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions as East and West Florida, respectively.



The Caribbean territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico were not included in this report due to data limitations. Similarly, the territories of American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands are also excluded.

The report groups the information on the top fishing communities by state within each region. Each section begins with a regional summary that provides an overview of the regional coastal physical geography, some information on historical importance and involvement in marine fishing, some highlights of the demographic similarities and differences among the fishing communities, and ends with a list of "Fishing Communities Facts" for the region. This is followed by one page of tables for each state in the region. The tables compare: sex and age and race/ethnicity distributions in 2000 for the fishing communities combined compared to the state as a whole; demographic attributes for the individual fishing communities in 2000 compared to the state; and indicators of growth, marine health, and population well-being for the state for 1997-2006. A list of other communities and ports in the state with involvement in marine fisheries concludes each state's section. The report concludes with: a Data Sources list identifying the report's data sources, a Resources section listing web-based resources and publications for those who want to learn more about U.S. marine fishing communities and the management of our living marine resources, and a Glossary providing definitions of specialized terminology.

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Great diversity characterizes the Nation's marine fishing communities and ports. Patterned similarities also exist. A few highlights follow.

Physical Geography

The United States' fishing communities and ports are located in coastal areas within the North Pacific region's arctic and polar zones, as well as the temperate middle latitudes that characterize the New England and Mid-

Atlantic regions, most of the Pacific region, and some of the South Atlantic region. The southern third of California, the coastal areas of the South Atlantic region's states of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida are all subtropical, as are the coastal areas of all the states in the Gulf of Mexico region. The tip of the Florida Keys, the Caribbean region, and the Western Pacific region are in the tropics. These differences affect local and regional fisheries.

Among the regions, the North Pacific (Alaska) has the longest ocean coastline (6,640 miles), while the shortest ocean coastlines are found in New England (473 miles) and the Mid-Atlantic (428 miles). The other regions fall in between as follows: South Atlantic (1,168 miles), Gulf of Mexico (1,631 miles), and the Pacific (1,293 miles). Hawaii in the Western Pacific region is composed of islands. The Hawaiian chain is 1,500 miles long, and the seven inhabited islands share 750 miles of coastline.

Susceptibility to Natural Disasters

Fishing communities and ports are located in coastal zones putting them at risk for hurricanes and tropical storms, and other dangers like tsunamis. Fishing communities and ports around the Gulf of Mexico share the Nation's highest potential for annual hurricane seasons that disrupt commercial and recreational fishing, while the worst among these storms can destroy entire communities. For example, the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. The Gulf of Mexico's per annum average is 10.7 declared disasters and emergencies due to hurricanes, tropical storms, and depressions combined, while the South Atlantic region comes in second with an average of 6.4 major weather-related disasters. Severe winter storms are most likely to affect marine fisheries in the North Pacific region.

Early History

For thousands of years prior to European colonization of North America, Native Americans were utilizing marine and aquatic resources along the coasts, while Polynesian peoples whose cultures were intimately involved with the marine environment began occupying the Pacific islands by at least 400 A.D. The earliest European arrivals found a variety of marine resources already being utilized in most coastal areas. Marine resources were among the first natural resources targeted by these early Europeans.

Historic patterns of involvement in commercial fishing by particular racial or ethnic groups continue to characterize contemporary commercial fishing in many parts of the country. Some examples include: Scandinavians (Norwegians, Danes, and Swedes) in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Pacific regions; Portuguese and Sicilians in the New England region and Italians in the Pacific region;

francophone Acadians in New England and Cajuns in the Gulf of Mexico; British in the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions; African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico; Chinese in the Pacific region; Vietnamese in the Gulf of Mexico and the Western Pacific; and Native Americans in the Pacific and North Pacific regions.

Some Fishing Community Contrasts Across Regions

The Nation's top commercial fishing communities and ports range from subareas of major metropolitan centers such as Houston, Texas (pop. 1,953,631), San Diego, California (pop. 1,223,400), Honolulu, Hawaii (pop. 876,156), and Jacksonville, Florida (pop. 735,617), to small villages such as Winter Harbor, Maine (pop. 988), Naknek, Alaska (pop. 678), La Push, Washington (pop. 371), Wachapreague, Virginia (pop. 236), and Valona, Georgia (pop. 123). Some interesting points made in the regional summaries follow.

The North Pacific region's top fishing communities all tend to be smaller communities, with an average population of 3,620, within a state in which ninety-nine percent of its fishing communities have populations with fewer than 12,000. Alaska's fishing communities with shoreside processing facilities attract large temporary populations who sometimes outnumber permanent residents.

Fishing communities in the State of Hawai'i are defined as the seven main inhabited islands. Most small-scale commercial fishing boats are transported by trailer so they can be launched at diverse sites. Honolulu is the home port for the Hawaii-based longline fishing fleet, responsible for the majority of commercial fish landed in Hawai'i.

The median population for the top commercial fishing communities in the Pacific region's three states combined is 84,038. Seven of California's, nine of Washington's top fishing communities, and all ten of Oregon's top fishing communities fall below the median. Five of Washington's top commercial fishing communities have populations of fewer than 1,000 compared to three of California's and none of Oregon's. Four of California's top commercial fishing communities are located in urban areas of more than 75,000 people, while only one of Washington's, and none of Oregon's top commercial fishing communities are in urban areas.

The Gulf of Mexico's top fishing communities tend to be smaller towns and villages with populations below 20,000 persons. However one major metropolitan center approaching 2 million (Houston, Texas), and a few larger coastal cities also have significant fisheries involvement (Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; and Brownsville, Texas). The majority of Louisiana's and Alabama's top fishing communities have populations below 5,000.

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Nine of Louisiana's top fishing communities and seven of Alabama's top fishing communities fall in this group.

Florida's top commercial fishing communities are the largest in the South Atlantic region. They include subareas of large cities like Jacksonville (pop. 735,617) and Miami (pop. 362,470); none have populations below 10,000. In contrast, North Carolina's top commercial fishing communities have populations below 6,000 and six are smaller than 2,000. Both Georgia and South Carolina are more mixed. Each has a larger city – Savannah, Georgia (pop. 131,510) and Charleston, South Carolina (pop. 96,650) – involved in commercial and saltwater recreational fishing, as well as some small fishing villages. Examples include Valona (pop. 123) and Midway (pop. 1,100), Georgia, and McClellanville (pop. 459) and Wadmalaw Island (pop. 2,611), South Carolina.

Several major metropolitan areas are located in the Mid-Atlantic region, a center of population for the United States. The Mid-Atlantic region's top fishing communities located within larger urban areas are all located in Virginia. They include Virginia Beach (pop. 425,257), Richmond (pop. 197,790), Newport News (pop. 180,150), and Hampton (pop. 146,437). Seven of the region's top fishing communities are smaller cities with populations between 10,000 and 41,000. Examples include Atlantic City (pop. 40,517) and Point Pleasant (pop. 19,306), New Jersey, and Ocean-side (pop. 32,733), Islip (pop. 20,575), and Hampton Bays (pop. 12,236), New York. The majority of Maryland's (seven of nine), Delaware's (three of five), New Jersey's (seven of ten), and New York's (five of eight) top fishing communities fall between 1,000 and 7,700 in population. Six of the region's top fishing communities have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants.

The largest metropolitan area in the New England region is Boston (pop. 589,141), a center for financial services and insurance for the fishing industry, as well as the home of the Nation's oldest continuously operating daily fish pier. The other New England region's top fishing communities that are located within urban areas of more than 100,000 population are Providence (pop. 173,618), Rhode Island, and Bridgeport (pop. 139,529) and New Haven (pop. 123,626), Connecticut. Exclusive of these large cities, the average population for the top fishing communities is 32,846 for Massachusetts, 31,456 for Connecticut, and 26,175 for Rhode Island. Maine averages 3,196 (excludes Portland, pop. 64,249), while New Hampshire averages 6,115 (excludes Portsmouth, pop. 20,784). Both Maine and New Hampshire's top fishing communities are predominantly smaller communities. Eight of Maine's and four of New Hampshire's have populations of less than 8,000. Only two of Massachusetts' and one of Rhode Island's top fishing communities have populations of less than 8,000, while Connecticut has none.

The Effects of Population Growth on Coastal Areas

Many coastal areas in these states are experiencing growth in their populations as people seek homes near the ocean. This is particularly true in the areas with milder climates. These patterns affect everything from fish habitat, particularly nursery grounds in shallow coastal waters, to the continued availability of commercial fishing infrastructure like docking facilities and other support services, as real estate values increase in the face of demand for alternative uses. In some regions, commercial fishing is being eclipsed by saltwater recreational fishing. The South Atlantic region, which includes the Atlantic Coast of Florida and several desirable beach vacation areas in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, is a good example of this change. The Mississippi's Gulf Coast in the Biloxi area is another example. In this area, Hurricane Katrina's devastation has served to speed the transformation of real estate from commercial fishing support uses to uses that support the gaming industry.

Community Resiliency, Growth, Marine Health, and Well Being

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 9.2% of family households in the U.S. live below the poverty rate. The 222 top fishing communities in the U.S. have an average poverty rate of 10.1%, just above the national rate. Poverty rates range in top fishing communities from 0% in Valona, Georgia to 33.7% in Crescent City, California, with the majority of communities falling between 2% and 10%. All states except Alaska, Delaware, Maine, and New Hampshire have fishing communities with poverty rates above 11%. The majority of fishing communities in Georgia (seven of ten), Alabama (seven of ten), Texas (seven of ten), Mississippi (four of seven), and Louisiana (nine of ten), and half of the fishing communities in Oregon and South Carolina have poverty rates above 11%.

Nationwide, 18% of residents five years of age or older speak a language other than English at home according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Overall, top fishing communities ranged from 0% of residents five years of age or older speaking a language other than English at home (Crescent, Georgia) and 1% (Bowers Beach, Delaware) to 87% (Brownsville, Texas) and 93% (Ni'ihau, Hawaii). Twenty-two percent (48 of 222) of the top fishing communities in the U.S. had a higher rate than the national rate. The majority of fishing communities in Hawai'i (six of seven), California (seven of ten), and Texas (seven of ten), and half of the communities in Alaska, reported rates above the national rate.

The national median household income was \$42,000 according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Top fishing communi-

ties had median household incomes that ranged between \$18,000 (Crisfield, Maryland) to \$146,755 (Darien, Connecticut). Thirty-eight percent (84 of 222) of the top fishing communities in the U.S. had a higher median income than the national median. The majority of fishing communities in Alaska (nine of ten), California (seven of ten), Connecticut (seven of ten), Rhode Island (seven of ten), New Jersey (seven of ten), New York (six of eight), Hawaii (four of seven), and all fishing communities in New Hampshire had median household incomes above \$42,000.

Conclusion

The above concludes our overview of the Nation's coastlines. The following sections return in detail to individual regions embracing the twenty-three states covered by this report. A list of fishing communities and ports is provided at the end of each regional summary. More detailed information on some of these communities can be found in the regional community profiles. If available, citations for these profiles are also listed at the end of each regional summary. For additional information related to fishing communities and sociocultural research conducted by NMFS social science staff, a detailed bibliography and list of other source materials appears at the end of this publication.