

Cathlamet, Washington

People and Place

Location

Cathlamet is located along the southwestern border of Washington State at 46°12'12"N and 123°22'55"W.¹ The community is situated on the north bank of Cathlamet Channel on the Columbia River north of Puget Island. Birnie Creek and the Elochoman River lie north of Cathlamet. Elochoman Slough, site of the community's marina, lies southwest of Cathlamet where the Elochoman River enters the Columbia. Portland, Oregon, the nearest major metropolitan area, lies about 89 miles to the southeast. Nearby communities include Longview, Washington (25 miles), and Astoria, Oregon (31 miles). Cathlamet occupies a land area of 0.4 square miles.²

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Cathlamet had a population of 565 people. The community supported a population of 508 in 1990, revealing a gross population increase of 11.2% between censuses. The community displayed an uneven gender balance in 2000, with 44.8% male and 55.2% female residents. This gender imbalance can be partially explained by the fact that women 75 and older significantly outnumbered men in this age category. The population under 75 years of age was composed of 47.9% male and 52.1% female residents.

The age structure of Cathlamet in 2000 featured a median age of 48.8, almost 14 years older than the national median age of 35.3. Residents 75 years of age and over represented 18% of the population in Cathlamet (compared to 5% of the national population). The community's skewed age structure may be related to the census count of individuals living in Cathlamet's Columbia View Nursing Home, an elder care facility with 53 beds.

The racial composition of Cathlamet was relatively homogenous in 2000. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 94.2% of residents identified themselves as White, 0.5% as Black or African American alone, 1.6% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.9% as Asian. A total of 0.4% of the population identified as "Other," and 2.3% identified with two or more races. Only 0.5% of Cathlamet residents indicated Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. Of the total population of Cathlamet, 2.5% indicated on the census that they were foreign-born. Of these foreign-born residents, 78.6% were from various European nations (UK, Ireland, and Austria) and 21.4% were Mexican.

Cathlamet's population in 2000 lived in 246 households, with 68% of residents living in family households. About 10.3% of the population (57 residents) lived in institutionalized group quarters. This figure likely represents the population of the Columbia View Nursing Home. About 83.5% of Cathlamet residents 18 and over had a high school diploma/equivalency or higher, 17.9% had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 7.7% had completed a graduate or professional degree. The highest level of educational attainment for 25.8% of residents was a high school degree.

History

The community of Cathlamet derives its name from a band of Chinook Indians living along the stretch of the Columbia River from Tongue Point to Puget Island. The Cathlamet band inhabited a large village in the vicinity of the modern town of Cathlamet and participated heavily in the salmon trade on the Columbia. They spoke a distinct dialect of the Chinook language in

which the word “Cathlamet” means “stone,” a reference to the especially rocky bottom of the nearby Cathlamet Channel in the Columbia River.³ When Lewis and Clark visited the area in 1806, they estimated the native population of Cathlamet at 300. As European exploration and settlement escalated, the Cathlamet band was largely displaced and incorporated into neighboring Chinook groups. Many descendants of these native groups remain in the region today.

In 1846, James Birnie, a Scottish immigrant and a member of the Hudson Bay Company, established a small trading post at the site of contemporary Cathlamet. He named the post Birnie’s Retreat and made his reputation facilitating trade between native residents, European settlers, and entrepreneurs traveling along the Columbia River. Birnie’s Retreat grew and was eventually renamed Cathlamet as settlers arrived in the region to take advantage of opportunities for logging, fishing, and farming. Cathlamet became the Wahkiakum County Seat in 1854 and was officially incorporated in 1907.⁴

Logging and fishing dominated the economic and social life of Cathlamet until the latter part of the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1840s, a number of successful lumber mills in the vicinity of Cathlamet harvested and processed softwoods (mainly cedar and fir) and furniture-grade maple and alder for export. Prominent lumber and paper pulp companies, such as Crown-Zellerbach and Weyerhaeuser, remained major employers within the region until the onset of the timber industry’s steep decline in the 1980s. At its Cathlamet paper mill, Crown-Zellerbach supported around 260 employees from 1961 to 1981, when it introduced its first substantial wave of layoffs.⁵ Today, several smaller logging companies operate near Cathlamet and self-employed contractors continue to log on land owned by Weyerhaeuser and other major forest product manufacturers. Some neighboring communities still support paper and pulp mills, but the scale of these logging enterprises has greatly diminished over time.

Like the logging industry, commercial and recreational fishing in Cathlamet have also undergone dramatic transformations over the past 100 years. Both native populations and early European settlers depended heavily on the abundance of salmon in the nearby Columbia River. The early salmon trade in Cathlamet focused on salting and exporting fish purchased from native fisherman. In the 1860s, entrepreneurs constructed numerous salmon canning facilities throughout the region. These canneries quickly became significant employers. Operations like the Warren and Waterford Canneries in Cathlamet initially owned boats and equipment and employed fisherman to harvest salmon for their specific canneries. As the cost of fishing technology rose, canneries began contracting with self-employed fisherman but continued to advance fisherman the cost of gear until the 1970s. Area fishermen mainly harvested salmon via gillnetting, but traps and seines were also popular technologies. During the height of the salmon boom, Wahkiakum County canneries processed 85% of the salmon pack on the Columbia River.⁶

The salmon industry crashed throughout the Cathlamet region in the latter part of the twentieth century, and the last cannery operating in Wahkiakum County closed in 1994. Despite the decline of the salmon industry, commercial fishing remains an important industry in Cathlamet. Gillnetting for salmon continues, but decreased fishing effort in the area has made it more difficult to fund channel maintenance necessary to prevent damage to nets.⁷ To supplement income earned by fishing on the Columbia, some commercial fishermen based in Cathlamet travel to Alaska seasonally or fish in nearby Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, or Puget Sound. Some also engage in albacore trolling on the coast. In 1971, the Town of Cathlamet constructed the Elochoman Slough Marina, which is used heavily by sport fishermen seeking sturgeon on the Elochoman River or salmon on the Columbia River.⁸ Sportfishing enjoys increasing importance

as a revenue generator for the town. The Cathlamet Town Council also constructed a public dock on the Columbia River in the 1980s to attract fishermen, kayakers, and other river travelers to area businesses.

Today, Cathlamet maintains a working commercial waterfront and symbolic links to its history as a logging community, but the town is also increasingly reliant on its status as a destination for tourists and other recreational visitors. Many homes and public buildings in Cathlamet are more than a century old, making the town a popular site for film crews, and the community has been featured in at least two major motion pictures.⁹ Several events are held throughout the year including the Cathlamet Wooden Boat Festival & Salmon Barbeque, held each year at the Elochoman Marina. The festival celebrates the community's economic and cultural dependence on the Columbia River and the nearby Pacific Ocean. Educational and entertaining festival activities include a wooden boat-building contest, a Coast Guard fly-over and mock water rescue, a nautical swap meet, and blindfolded dinghy races.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

The contemporary economy in Cathlamet relies heavily on jobs in health care, education, public administration, and businesses related to the longtime regional staples of tourism, fishing, and logging. Major employers include the Columbia View Nursing Home, regional hospitals in nearby communities (Longview, Washington, and Astoria, Oregon), the Cathlamet Town and Wahkaikum County governments, Wahkiakum School District 200, the nearby Judith Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge, and the Elochoman Slough Marina. Some Cathlamet residents work for local logging contractors, and others commute to manufacturing jobs in nearby communities, such as the Longview Fiber Company's pulp and paper mill in Longview. Although its importance has decreased some over the years, the Columbia River Waterfront still generates considerable economic activity. Brusco Tug & Barge, a tow outfit based in Longview, maintains a tugboat maintenance facility in Cathlamet, and local commercial fishermen seine, trap, and engage in gillnetting for salmon and other marketable species regionally. A substantial number of Cathlamet fishermen now fish seasonally in Alaska, where they may be able to earn more income than they can by fishing regionally.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 43.6% of Cathlamet residents 16 and over were employed in 2000, and 51.7% were not in the labor force (not actively seeking work). The unemployment rate in Cathlamet was 9.7% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force), a value higher than the national rate of 5.7%. In 2000 about 29.7% of Cathlamet residents were employed in education health, and social services, with the majority of these workers concentrated in health care and social assistance. The majority (77.6%) of these education and health care workers were women. Approximately 11.3% of the city's employed civilian population 16 and over indicated that they worked in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting in 1999. However, this number may be artificially low because it does not include fisherman, loggers, and other contractors classified as self-employed. Approximately 11.3% of residents worked in public administration, 10.8% in manufacturing, and 10.3% in arts, entertainment, and food services. The government employed a substantial 24.4% of Cathlamet's population in 2000. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, no Cathlamet residents were in the military.

The per capita income in Cathlamet was about \$18,588 in 1999, compared to a national per capita income of \$21,587. The median household income in Cathlamet was about \$33,409,

compared to a national median household income of \$41,994. Approximately 15.1% of residents were living below the poverty level in 1999, a value larger than the national poverty level of 12.4%.

There were 278 housing units in Cathlamet in 2000. Approximately 11.5% of these units were vacant at the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, and 34.3% of these vacant units were intended for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. About 56.9% of occupied housing units were owner-occupied, compared to 66.2% ownership for occupied housing units in the U.S. overall. Remaining housing units were renter-occupied.

Governance

Because its population falls well under the 1500 needed to incorporate as a city under Washington State law, Cathlamet is designated as a town. The Town of Cathlamet was incorporated in 1907 and is governed locally by a Mayor and a 5-member Town Council. Cathlamet is also the County Seat of Wahkiakum County and houses the main office and services associated with the county government. Wahkiakum County and the Town of Cathlamet levy a 7.5% sales tax and no additional hotel/lodging tax.^{10,11}

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.¹² Those who both catch and sell fish in Washington are eligible for a Multiple Activities Tax Credit (MATC).¹³

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.”¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

Cathlamet lies within the jurisdiction of the Pacific Fisheries Management Council and is approximately 89 driving miles from Council meetings in Portland, 152 miles from Seattle, 708 miles from San Francisco, and 1158 miles from San Diego.¹⁷ The nearest U.S. Coast Guard Group and Air Station is located in Warrenton, Oregon (51 miles), and the Coast Guard operates the National Motor Lifeboat School (NMLB) in Ilwaco, Washington (51 miles).¹⁸ Cathlamet 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 (65 miles).

Facilities

Cathlamet lies along the Ocean Beach Highway, which turns eastward and inland from the Washington coast to follow the course of the Columbia River. Cathlamet residents can obtain groceries and major supplies in town, but must travel to the larger communities of Longview, Washington (25 miles) or Astoria, Oregon (31 miles) to reach hospitals, airports, and other such amenities. Longview is accessible via the Ocean Beach Highway, and Oregon can be reached via a short ferry that leaves from the south shore of Puget Island (in the Columbia River, linked to Cathlamet via a bridge).

The nearest major international airport is located in Portland, Oregon (89 miles). Astoria Regional Airport in Astoria, Oregon, provides certified carrier operations, and the Kelso-Longview Regional Airport in Kelso (26 miles), Washington, provides an unattended paved runway that is open to the public. There are several bed and breakfasts located in Cathlamet, but the nearest major chain hotels are located in nearby Longview, Washington.

All of Wahkiakum County shares a single school district, Wahkiakum School District 200, and all schools in this district are located in Cathlamet. Wahkiakum High School and a combined K-8 facility, J. Wendt Elementary/Wahkiakum Middle School, serve Cathlamet and the surrounding unincorporated areas of the county.

The Cathlamet Water and Sewer Plants provide drinking water and sewer services to area residents. The Wahkiakum Public Utilities District, headquartered in Cathlamet, administers electric services.¹⁹ The closest major health care facilities are Hospice Care Center Hospital and Peacehealth St. John Medical Center in Longview, Washington, and Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, Oregon. Law enforcement services are provided by the Wahkiakum County Sheriff's Office. Cathlamet has a volunteer fire department and is formally served by the Cathlamet Fire Department.²⁰

The Elochoman Slough Marina is located within walking distance of downtown Cathlamet at the mouth of the Elochoman River. The marina lies in a secluded, protected harbor and features a boat launch, spaces for yachts and fishing boats to moor overnight, and sites for recreational vehicles and tent camping. The marina charges \$5 per boat for use of the launch and \$10 per night for overnight mooring of boats. The marina is used heavily during salmon and sturgeon seasons on the Elochoman and the Lower Columbia Rivers.²¹ The town also maintains a public dock and float on the Columbia River that draws fisherman and river tourists into town businesses.²²

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Landings data for Cathlamet were recorded as part of the Other Columbia River Port Group which includes the nearby communities of Altoona, Brookfield, Camas, Carrolls, Kalama, Longview, Pillar Rock, Skamania, Woody Island, Washougal, Vancouver, Stella, Ridgefield, Puget Island, Pacific County, Megler, Kelso, Gray's Bay, Frankfort, and The Dalles. 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): salmon (354 t/\$481,947/355), shellfish (confidential/confidential/1), and other species (34 t/\$127,830/119).

Commercial fishing remains a lucrative sector of Cathlamet's economy, but the community's involvement in local West Coast fisheries has waned since the crash of the area's salmon industry. Because there are no longer any processors or canneries located in the community, fish caught by fishermen living in Cathlamet are most likely landed and processed elsewhere.

In 2000, Cathlamet fisherman involved in the West Coast fisheries owned a total of 37 vessels, 15 of which participated in the Federally Managed Groundfish fishery. According to recorded data the numbers of vessels owned by Cathlamet residents that participated in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (2/2/0), groundfish (0/0/NA), highly migratory species (NA/0/NA), salmon (12/14/1), shellfish (NA/0/NA), shrimp (NA/0/0), and other species (6/0/0).²³

No individuals living in Cathlamet in 2000 held federal groundfish fishery permits. In the same year, recorded data indicates that the number of Cathlamet residents holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab (4/1/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), other species (7/0/0), salmon (25/14/1), shellfish (6/0/NA), and shrimp (2/0/0).²⁴

According to available data, 47 state permits were registered to Cathlamet 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 (5/0/0), highly migratory species (NA/0/0), salmon (32/0/2), shellfish (0/0/NA), and other species (8/0/0).²⁵

Sportfishing

Cathlamet is a popular destination for sport fishermen because of its proximity to both the Elochoman and Columbia rivers. According to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, there are two official sport license vendors in Cathlamet. In 2003 and 2004, no South Bend residents owned or operated charter boats in Washington State.

A number of Cathlamet residents engage in sportfishing along the Columbia River and the nearby Pacific Coast. Numerous charter vessels operate out of the Port of Cathlamet, such as M/V *Lucky Dog*, owned by Sea Breeze Charters in Ilwaco.²⁶ Cathlamet is also a popular boat-launching site for local anglers fishing for trout, salmon, and steelhead from the Columbia River.

The closest Catch Record Card Areas to Cathlamet 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 sportfishermen 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

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 Chinook Tribe and other nontribal subsistence fishermen may obtain fishery resources from waters of the Columbia and nearby tributaries near Cathlamet however 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

Since the crash of the local salmon fishery, many commercial fishermen based in Cathlamet have become increasingly involved in North Pacific fisheries. In 2000, Cathlamet fishermen owned 38 vessels active in North Pacific fisheries. In the same year, these vessels landed fish in the following North Pacific fisheries (data shown represent landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): crab (confidential/confidential/1), finfish (confidential/confidential/1), Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish (confidential/confidential/1), Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish (49.5 t/\$479,390/4), halibut (confidential/confidential/1), herring (confidential/confidential/2), and salmon (725.7 t/\$784,650/26).

In 2000, at least 55 Cathlamet residents worked as crewmembers on vessels involved in North Pacific fisheries. Cathlamet residents held 65 state and federal permits, with 10 individuals holding federal permits and 47 individuals holding state permits. These community members held 2 crab License Limitation program (LLP) permits, 2 groundfish LLP permits, three Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) crab permits, 6 CFEC BSAI groundfish permits, 2 CFEC halibut permits, 3 CFEC herring permits, and 44 CFEC salmon permits. Cathlamet fishermen held 1,644,188 and 1,952,810 individual fishing quota shares for the halibut and sablefish fisheries respectively.

Sportfishing

According to state records, Cathlamet residents purchased a total of 53 sportfishing licenses for North Pacific fisheries in 2000.

¹ Unites States Geological Survey. 2004. Geographic Names Information System, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnis/web_query.gnis_web_query_formH](http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnis/web_query.gnis_web_query_formH) (access date - June 2004).

² United States Census. 2000. American Fact Finder, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)H (access date - July 2004).

³ Tacoma Public Library. 2004. Washington State Place Names Index, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://search.tpl.lib.wa.us/wanamesH](http://search.tpl.lib.wa.us/wanamesH) (access date - June 2004).

⁴ Martin, Irene. 1997. Beach of Heaven: A History of Wahkiakum County. Washington State University, Pullman.

⁵ Martin, Irene. 1997. Beach of Heaven: A History of Wahkiakum County. Washington State University, Pullman.

⁶ Martin, Irene. 1997. Beach of Heaven: A History of Wahkiakum County. Washington State University, Pullman.

⁷ Martin, Irene. 1997. Beach of Heaven: A History of Wahkiakum County. Washington State University, Pullman.

⁸ Wahkiakum Merchants Association. 2004. Things to See and Do in Wahkiakum County, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://www.welcometowahkiakum.com/thingstodo.html](http://www.welcometowahkiakum.com/thingstodo.html)H (access date - August 2004).

⁹ No Author. 2004. Recreation Guide 2004: Heading West Along the River. The Daily News, Longview, Washington, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://welcome.tdn.com/index.php?id=26](http://welcome.tdn.com/index.php?id=26)H (access date - August 2004).

¹⁰ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2004. Local Sales & Use Tax Rates and Changes, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://dor.wa.gov/Docs/forms/ExcsTx/LocSalUseTx/LocalSIsUseFlyer_Quarterly.pdf](http://dor.wa.gov/Docs/forms/ExcsTx/LocSalUseTx/LocalSIsUseFlyer_Quarterly.pdf)H (access date - July 2004).

¹¹ Washington State Department of Revenue. 2003. Lodging Tax Rates by Location, [Online]. Available: URL: [Hhttp://dor.wa.gov/docs/forms/excstx/locsalusetx/lodgingrates_03_a.pdf](http://dor.wa.gov/docs/forms/excstx/locsalusetx/lodgingrates_03_a.pdf)H (access date - July 2004).

¹² 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).

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- ¹³ 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).
- ¹⁴ 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).
- ¹⁵ 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).
- ¹⁶ 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).
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- ²² Forgey, Pat. 2002. Troubled Waters. The Daily News, Longview, Washington. 18 June.
- ²³ '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.
- ²⁴ '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.
- ²⁵ '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.
- ²⁶ Sea Breeze Charters. 2005. Fishing Trips, [Online]. Available: URL: <http://www.seabreezecharters.net/html/trips.html> (access date - January 2005).