

Morro Bay

People and Place

Location

Morro Bay is located on the coast in San Luis Obispo County. The community is approximately 213 miles north of Los Angeles and 231 miles south of San Francisco. Morro Bay encompasses 5.2 square miles of land and 5 square miles of water. Its geographic coordinates are lat 35°22'39"N, long 120°51'03"W.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Morro Bay was 10,350, a 7.1% decrease from 1990. The gender composition was 52.3% female and 47.3% male. The median age in 2000 was 45.7, 10 years higher than the national median of 35.3. Of the population 18 years of age and older, 89.6% had a high school education or higher, 25% had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 9.4% had a graduate or professional degree; the national averages were 79.7%, 22.3%, and 7.8% respectively. A high school education was the highest level of educational attainment for 24.3%.

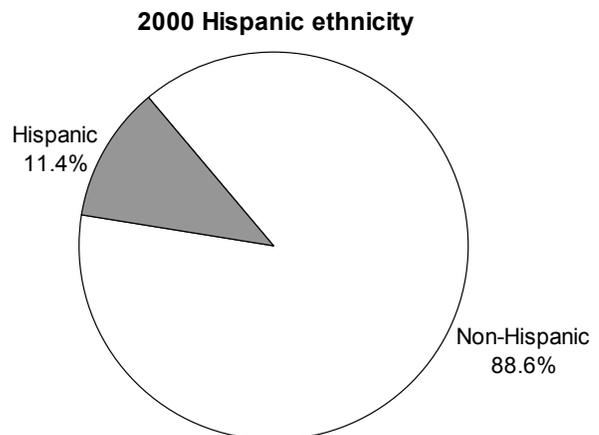
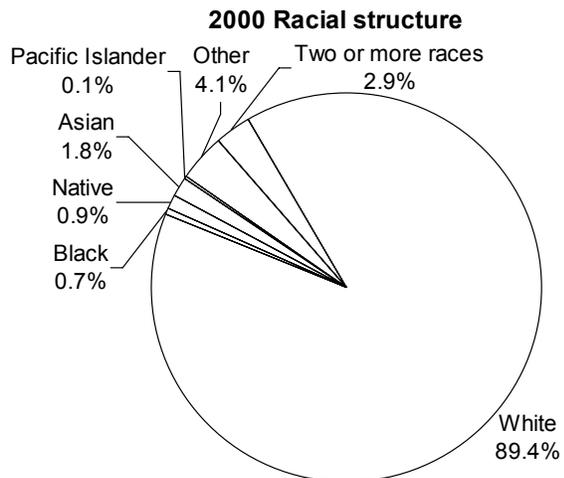
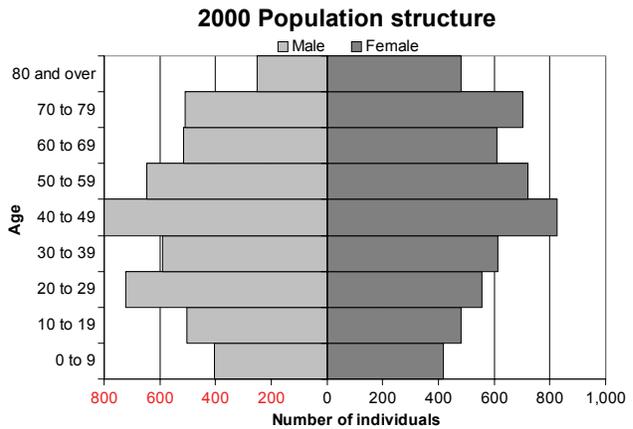
The majority of the racial composition was white (89.4%), followed by individuals who identified with some other race (4.1%), individuals who identified with two or more races (2.9%), and Asian (1.8%). Blacks, American Indian and Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders each accounted for less than 1% of the population. Ethnicity data indicate 11.4% identified as Hispanic and 7.2% of the population was foreign-born with a high percentage from Mexico.

In 2000 69.2% of the population lived in family households.

History

Morro Bay takes its name from Morro Rock, an ancient landmark towering 576 feet above the entrance to the bay. Morro Rock is one of nine extinct volcanic peaks that run in a straight line for 12 miles. In 1542 Portuguese conquistador Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo dubbed the rock "the Gibraltar of the Pacific" and Spanish galleons sailing the coast used it to identify Morro Bay's safe harbor.

Coastal Chumash Indians had settlements in area. Chumash hunters, fishermen, and foragers exploited their marine, coastal, and river resources. They regularly transported resources from their offshore islands to the mainland in unique redwood-planked boats known as "tomols." The Chumash imported specialized stone



blades and drills manufactured on the islands, plus marine resources such as shark, bonito, and halibut. Their fishermen used a variety of nets, traps, baskets, hooks, spears, and plant poisons to catch or stun fish and catch seals and sea otters. On the coast they collected abalone and mussels, and established a trade network to pass raw marine materials such as fish, whale bones, and oils to the interior.

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo first encountered the Chumash in 1542, but it was not until 1772 that five Catholic missions were established within Chumash territory. After the secularization of the missions in 1833, the Chumash population fell into severe decline. In 1901 the U.S. government allocated 75 acres along Zanja de Cota Creek near Mission Santa Ynez to the surviving Chumash. Today they have their own business council, a thriving bingo operation, and a federal housing program on the small reservation. About 5,000 people identify themselves as Chumash Indians.¹

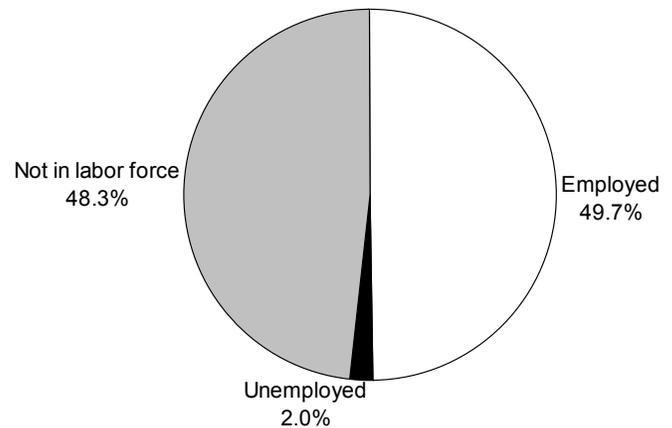
The town of Morro Bay was founded in 1870 and a wharf was built, soon to become the bustling “Embarcadero.” The town grew quickly based on trade in wool, dairy products, potatoes, and barley.

Boats entered the harbor through channels on the north and south sides of the rock, but these entrances were dangerous due to erratic winds and surging tides. This resulted in competition from nearby Port Cayucos. Many ships called at this deep water port rather than face the dangers of Morro Bay’s entrance. By the 1930s Morro Bay had developed as a community, and attention turned to improving the harbor. Quarrying on Morro Rock provided the materials for a jetty closing the north entrance of the harbor and a breakwater protecting the south entrance. The south channel was then dredged, resulting in a safe entrance to Morro Bay.

The Embarcadero bustled as commercial fishermen soon began landing large catches of albacore tuna, cod, and salmon. By 1939 Morro Bay’s population reached 400, and a year later the U.S. Navy began operations. The facilities fell into disrepair after World War II. In 1968 Morro Rock was designated as a state historical landmark and is now protected against human alterations.² In the 1940s an abalone fishing industry developed in and around the bay. Although abalone stocks have dramatically declined, Morro Bay remains a significant fishing port for halibut, rockfish, sole, and other species. The community now combines fishing with coastal tourism.³

Today Morro Bay State Park features a natural bay habitat and lagoon. The park has opportunities for birding, fishing, hiking, and sailing. The park museum features exhibits on natural (geology/oceanography) and cultural (Native American) features of the area. The park

2000 Employment structure



also has a small marina and a pristine marsh that supports a flourishing bird population.⁴ Along the waterfront Embarcadero is the Morro Bay Aquarium. This family owned, nonprofit aquarium was built in the 1960s, and became a rehabilitation center for marine mammals in 1984. It currently features a harbor seal and three sea lions, as well as 14 tanks filled with local marine life.⁵

Tourism is an important component of Morro Bay’s contemporary economy. The Morro Bay Harbor Festival is an annual celebration of the area’s unique food, wine, lifestyle, and working waterfront. The festival also offers music and numerous marine and harbor-oriented educational activities. “Since its inception, a primary goal of the festival has been to ... focus public awareness on the special value of Morro Bay’s harbor and its environment.”⁶

Infrastructure

Current Economy

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 49.7% of Morro Bay’s potential labor force 16 years of age and older were employed, 2% were unemployed, and the unemployment rate was 3.8% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). In addition, 48.3% were not in the labor force. Top employment sectors were local, state, or federal government (24.5%), education, health, and social services (21.8%), and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services (14.8%). Natural resource jobs including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed 3.7%, but this percentage may be artificially low because many fishermen are self-employed and are underrepresented in the data. The City of Morro Bay is the area’s largest employer.⁷

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Morro Bay’s per capita income in 1999 was \$21,687 and the median

household income was \$34,379. About 13% lived below the poverty level, slightly above the national average of 12.4%. In 2000 Morro Bay had 6,251 housing units, of which 79.8% were occupied and 20.2% were vacant. Of the occupied units, 55.6% were by owner and 44.4% were by renter. About 77.5% of the vacant units were for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

Governance

In 1964 Morro Bay became a general law city and elected its first five-member city council. City government includes the mayor and the city manager, who carries out council policies. Morro Bay has a 7.25% sales and use tax and San Luis Obispo County levies a 9% lodging tax that earned \$4,229,463 in fiscal year 2001.⁸ See the Governance subsection (page 43) in the Overview section for a more detailed discussion of taxes affecting fishermen and processors in California.

A California Department of Fish and Game Marine Region field office and a U.S. Coast Guard station are located in Morro Bay. Pacific Fishery Management Council meetings are held in Foster City, approximately 211 miles away. National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) laboratories are 125 miles away at Pacific Grove and 163 miles away at Santa Cruz, and the NMFS Southwest Regional Office is in Long Beach, approximately 234 miles south.

Facilities

Morro Bay is located northeast of San Luis Obispo on California Highway 1. San Luis Obispo County Regional Airport is about 19 miles from Morro Bay. The nearest major international airports are in Los Angeles and San Francisco, 213 and 231 miles away respectively. Morro Bay has two elementary schools and one high school. The city's public works department supplies water and wastewater services and its police department administers public safety. Three hospitals within 13 miles of Morro Bay provide health care. Morro Bay has more than two dozen hotels and inns.

The Morro Bay Marina has 24 moorings, 16 slips, and offers a variety of services for recreational vessels. The Morro Bay Yacht Club offers an additional six mooring spaces and a 150-foot dock for transient yachts. The City of Morro Bay manages the Morro Bay Harbor, which stretches along 1.5 miles of coast and was originally built as a military base during World War II. Morro Bay has a rich history of abalone harvesting and shark fishing. Commercial and recreational fishing have been the nucleus of the port, but today it primarily draws tourists and sportfishermen. The harbor has 150 off-shore moorings, 50 slips for commercial vessels, and about 400 berths.⁹ The commercial slips are subsidized

by the city. Additional moorage is available at Morro Bay State Park's small marina.

The Morro Bay Commercial Fisherman's Organization has received two grants from the Santa Barbara County Fisheries Enhancement Fund to pave two areas for storing fishing equipment and repairing nets at the harbor and to upgrade the computer system for offshore weather patterns and water temperatures.¹⁰

The Morro Bay National Estuaries Program encompasses the principle wetland system on south central coast. This estuary serves a critical environmental function and provides the eelgrass beds and wetlands that serve as a habitat for a number of migratory birds and as a nursery for juvenile off-shore marine fish. An aquaculture facility based in Morro Bay specializes in pacific oysters, bay mussels, and manila clams.

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

All large commercial processors have left Morro Bay, and landings are usually taken to processors in nearby Atascadero or Salinas. According to an employee of the Morro Bay Harbor Department, the commercial fishing culture of Morro Bay is rapidly disappearing.¹¹

In 2000 249 commercial vessels delivered landings to Morro Bay. Landings were made in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of landings/number of vessels landing): coastal pelagic 173.6 t/\$42,462/8; crab 1.8 t/\$5,779/17; groundfish 157.3 t/\$839,790/134; highly migratory species 592.5 t/\$1,507,833/94; salmon 154.8 t/\$573,072/70; shrimp 69 t/\$1,104,912/16; and other species 21 t/\$64,943/80.

Morro Bay residents owned 62 commercial vessels in 2000, of which 31 participated in the federally managed groundfish fishery. Five vessels participated in the 2003 Groundfish Vessels Buyback Program. The number of vessels owned by residents in 2000 that participated in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab 0/0/7, groundfish 0/0/NA, highly migratory species NA/0/NA, salmon 0/0/28, shellfish NA/0/NA, shrimp NA/0/5, and other species 2/0/0.¹²

In 2000 six Morro Bay residents held six federal groundfish permits. The number of residents holding permits in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic 0/0/5, crab 0/0/6, groundfish 0/0/41, highly migratory species NA/0/14, salmon 0/1/42, shellfish 0/0/NA, shrimp 2/1/21, and other species 0/1/59.¹³

There were at least 292 commercial fishing permits registered to Morro Bay residents in 2000, including 286

registered state permits. The number of state permits held by residents in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic 0/0/11, crab 0/0/6, groundfish 0/0/50, highly migratory species NA/0/28, salmon 0/1/76, shellfish 0/0/NA, shrimp 2/1/35, and other species 0/5/71.¹⁴

Sportfishing

A number of charter vessels operate out of Morro Bay, targeting albacore tuna, rock cod, salmon, and other species. Many also offer seasonal whale watching tours. In 2002 at least 36 charter businesses served sport fishermen and tourists in Morro Bay; by 2003 that number had dropped to 27. Two license agents sold sportfishing licenses in Morro Bay. In 2000 vendors in San Luis Obispo County sold 43,399 resident sportfishing licenses, 40 nonresident sportfishing licenses, 52 sport salmon punch cards, and 30 abalone report cards. In the port group consisting of Avila Beach and Morro Bay, 12 commercial passenger fishing vessels served 17,759 anglers in 2000 and reported 123,441 landings composed of more than a dozen species. Rockfish (unspecified) and albacore tuna accounted for 93.9% and 4.6% of the landings respectively.

Subsistence

Local tribal and nontribal community members may engage in subsistence fishing in the Morro Bay area, however, specific information is not discussed in detail due to the lack of available data. The California Department of Fish and Game uses the term “recreational” for fishermen who do not earn revenue from their catch, but fish for pleasure or to provide food for personal consumption. Information on subsistence fishing is captured to some degree in the sportfishing data.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 a Morro Bay resident owned one vessel that participated in North Pacific fisheries. The vessel made landings in the North Pacific salmon fishery, but specific information (landings in metric tons/value of landings) is confidential.

In 2000 one Morro Bay resident held a state Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission salmon permit for Alaska fisheries. Four residents held crew member licenses for North Pacific fisheries.

Sportfishing

Morro Bay residents purchased 19 Alaska sportfishing licenses in 2000.

Notes

1. Houghton Mifflin Company. No date. Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Chumash. Online at http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/naind/html/na_007400_chumash.htm [accessed September 2004].
2. Ernest & Allen Internet advertising. 1997. History of Morro Bay. Online at <http://www.morrobay.com/history/> [accessed 28 February 2007].
3. WorldHistory.com. 2004. Morro Bay, CA. Online at <http://www.worldhistory.com/wiki/M/Morro-Bay-California.htm> [accessed 28 February 2007].
4. State of California. 2004. Morro Bay State Park. Online at http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=594 [accessed 28 February 2007].
5. Ernest & Allen. 1998. Morro Bay Aquarium. Online at <http://www.morrobay.com/morrobayaquarium/> [accessed 28 February 2007].
6. Morro Bay Harbor Festival. 2004. Morro Bay harbor festival. Online at <http://morrobay.org/cm/Our%20City/Home.html> [accessed 28 February 2007].
7. Field notes, City of Morro Bay Harbor Department, 21 September 2004.
8. State of California. 2004. California counties transient lodging tax revenue. Online at <http://www.sco.ca.gov/ard/local/locprep/adhoc/county/0001cotranslodgtax.pdf> [accessed 28 February 2007].
9. Pacific State Marine Fisheries Commission. No date. California state counties. Online at http://www.psmfc.org/efin/docs/communities_2004/communities_pages65_84.pdf [accessed 28 February 2007].
10. County of Santa Barbara. 2004. Fisheries enhancement fund. Online at <http://www.countyofsb.org/energy/mitigation/fef.asp> [accessed 28 February 2007].
11. See note 7.
12. NA refers to data that were not available, for example, due to few or no recorded permit numbers, or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.
13. See note 12.
14. See note 12.