Warrenton

People and Place

Location

Warrenton is located on the northwestern tip of Oregon, bordered by the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Columbia River on the north. Portland is the nearest major city, about 92 miles southeast. The community encompasses 16.7 square miles of land and 4.4 square miles of water in Clatsop County. Warrenton is adjacent to Astoria, sharing a common boundary line in Youngs Bay. Its geographic coordinates are lat 46°09′55″N, long 123°55′21″W.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Warrenton was 4,096. Its population nearly doubled during the 1990s by annexing the town of Hammond. The gender composition was 49.3% female and 50.7% male. The median age of the population was 36.6 years, slightly above the national median of 35.3. Warrenton’s age structure demonstrated usual population trends for the United States. Of the population 18 years of age and older, 82.7% had a high school education or higher, 11.4% had bachelor’s degree or higher, and 4.1% had a graduate or professional degree; the national averages were 79.7%, 22.3%, and 7.8% respectively.

The majority of Warrenton’s racial structure was white (92.5%), followed by people who identified with two or more races (2.8%), Asian (1.8%), American Indian and Alaska Native (1.3%), individuals who identified with some other race (1.3%), black (0.2%), and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (0.1%). Ethnicity data indicate 2.9% identified as Hispanic. A small percentage (2.5%) was foreign-born, with a majority from the Americas outside of the United States, followed by people born in Asia and Europe. Warrenton is also home to people of Scandinavian, British, and German heritage.

In 2000 82.4% of the population lived in family households.

History

American commercial interest in the area began in 1792 when Captain Robert Gray came across the Columbia River on his fur-trading ship. Lewis and Clark’s 33-member expedition, the Corps of Discovery, arrived near present-day Astoria and Warrenton in the winter of 1805–06. The expedition is commemorated by the Astoria Column. The Chinook and Clatsop
populations each numbered about 400 when the Corps of Discovery visited their villages along the south bank of the Columbia. Lewis and Clark noted the tribes lived in wooden plank houses, were proficient seafarers in their large dugout canoes, and lived off the fish, roots, and berries plentiful in the area. Settled in the area to the south in villages between the mouth of the Necanicum River and Tillamook Bay was the considerably larger Tillamook population. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Tillamook population had declined to about 200 people, and today the tribe is no longer officially organized.

The Corp of Discovery built Fort Clatsop close to the mouth of the Columbia River and sheltered there through the winter. Members of the Pacific Fur Company arrived subsequently and established Fort Astoria. The resulting community, which grew into Astoria, is now the oldest U.S. settlement west of the Rocky Mountains. Until the 1900s emigrants to the area were predominantly of Scandinavian descent. Regardless of pervasive Scandinavian traditions such as public steam baths, lutefisk, smorrebrod platters, and church services in Finnish, the Astoria-Warrenton area has become a popular backdrop to represent the all-American city in numerous movies.

With the help of the Oregon Highway Department and $100,000 in funding from the Oregon and Washington State legislatures, the “Bridge to Nowhere” was completed in 1963 that spanned the Columbia. More than 2,000 major shipwrecks testify to the importance of the mouth of the river to commerce and fishing and to its dangerous waters and shoals that have earned it the nickname, “the Graveyard of the Pacific.”

Today the towns of Astoria and Warrenton form a closely connected community. This connection is particularly reflected in their involvement in the fishing industry. While separate profiles have been compiled for Warrenton and Astoria, the Astoria-Warrenton area can be considered as a cohesive community.

### Infrastructure

#### Current Economy

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 62.1% of Warrenton’s potential labor force 16 years of age and older were employed, 2.3% were unemployed, and the unemployment rate was 3.5% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). In addition, 35.6% were not in the labor force. The top employment sectors were education, health, and social services (19.3%), retail trade (18.6%), and state, local, or federal government (14.2%). Natural resource jobs including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed 3.4%, but this percentage may be artificially low because many fishermen are self-employed and are underrepresented in these data.

Fishing, lumber, agriculture, and food production rank among the largest industries in Clatsop County, although retail ranks among the largest economic sectors in Warrenton itself. The five largest public and private employers in Warrenton in 2004 were Fred Meyer (retail, 220 employees), Weyerhaeuser Company (lumber, 155 employees), Pacific Coast Seafoods Company (fish processing, 125 employees), Warrenton School District (education, 100 employees), and Costco (retail, 120 employees).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the per capita income was $16,874 and the median household income in 1999 was $33,472. In 1999 14.2% lived below the poverty level. In 2000 there were a total of 1,799 housing units in Warrenton, of which 90.1% were occupied and 9.9% were vacant. Of the occupied units, 65.3% were by owner and 34.7% were by renter. Of the vacant housing units, 29.8% were for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

#### Governance

Warrenton incorporated in 1899. The city is governed by a five-member elected commission, which in turn elects the mayor and the city manager. Oregon has no general sales tax, but levies a 1% tax on overnight lodging that supports the Oregon Tourism Commission. See the Governance section (page 43) of the Overview section for a more detailed discussion of taxes affecting fishermen and processors in Oregon.

An Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife field office is based in Astoria, and a National Marine Fisheries Service field station is in Hammond. A U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) air station is at the Astoria Airport. Astoria is also home to two cutters and a buoy tender at
the USCG buoy station at Tongue Point. Meetings of the Pacific Fishery Management and North Pacific Fishery Management councils are held in Portland, which also houses the district office for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Facilities

Warrenton is accessible by land, air, and sea. U.S. Highway 101 connects Warrenton and neighboring Astoria to other major transportation routes. Local bus service provides overland transportation for local residents, however, no bus service is available from Warrenton to points outside of Clatsop County. Operated by the Port of Astoria, the Astoria Regional Airport provides Astoria, Seaside, and Warrenton with local air transport. The closest major commercial airport is in Portland.

The Hammond-Warrenton School District has an elementary school and a high school. Clatsop Community College is in Astoria. Warrenton relies on surface water from the Lewis and Clark River, Big S Fork, Little S Fork, and Camp Creek. Utilities provided by the City of Warrenton include natural gas, electrical power, and solid waste management. The Warrenton Fire Department operates two stations and is made up of 37 paid and volunteer firefighters. The Warrenton Police Department comprised of 15 paid and reserve officers administers public safety. Columbia Memorial Hospital is located in Astoria where residents receive emergency services from ambulance and Life Flight Services. Additionally, one general clinic is available. There are several accommodation options in Warrenton, including bed and breakfasts, hotels, and motels.

Warrenton has two marinas. Facilities at the Warrenton Marina, 1 mile from the Skipanon Water Way on the Columbia River, include restrooms, showers, and a fish cleaning station. The marina contains 370 slips and offers overnight moorage for commercial and recreational vessels. Adjacent to the marina is space for larger vessels up to about 85 feet in length. The Hammond Marina, adjacent to the Columbia River, is used primarily by small pleasure crafts, some local commercial fishing vessels, and National Marine Fisheries Service research vessels. The Hammond Marina includes a double lane boat launching ramp, fueling dock, restrooms, a commercial repair shop, and a fish cleaning station.

The Port of Astoria significantly expands Warrenton’s marine and fisheries-related infrastructure. The port is the first deep-draft port encountered after entering the Columbia River and is 14 miles from the Pacific Ocean. The port maintains nearly 7,250 feet of total dock space on three piers. Bar pilots and Columbia River pilots navigate vessels in the area. By federal law, all ships entering the mouth of the Columbia at Astoria must be piloted by a licensed Columbia River bar pilot. Bar pilots are responsible for navigating vessels across the 17-mile stretch of river mouth. Upon crossing the mouth, pilotage is transferred to a Columbia River pilot, who is responsible for taking vessels to their final destinations along the 100-mile shipping channel.

Several local and regional associations and networks operate in the Astoria-Warrenton area; for more information on these associations, please consult the Astoria community profile. Additionally, several festivals take place in the Astoria-Warrenton area including the Blessing of the Fleet held in nearby Ilwaco in early May and Seaman’s Day held in Warrenton in late July. The Buoy 10 Festival, sponsored by the Warrenton Business Association, was held for the first time in 2005 before the Buoy 10 sport fishery begins. The Astoria Warrenton Crab and Seafood Festival occurs in late April. Numerous readers, musicians, artists, storytellers, and workshop presenters who work in commercial fishing and related industries come to Astoria for the event, which attracts a wide audience.

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 334 vessels, all commercially registered, delivered landings to the Astoria-Warrenton port complex. West Coast fishery landings made in Astoria-Warrenton in 2000 include (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of landings/number of vessels landing): coastal pelagic 5,907 t/$794,612/29; crab 1,399 t/$6,530,137/92; groundfish 45,284 t/$12,980,569/151; highly migratory species 1,682 t/$3,273,354/112; salmon 52 t/$138,537/82; shrimp 3,947 t/$3,816,430/48; and other species 178 t/$633,751/84.

Warrenton residents owned 52 vessels in 2000, of which 27 participated in the federally managed groundfish fishery. The number of vessels owned by residents that participated in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab 0/19/1, groundfish 0/0/NA, highly migratory species NA/0/NA, salmon 0/33/1, shellfish NA/3/NA, and shrimp NA/8/0. A handful of small vessels involved in the Columbia River gillnet fishery operate out of Warrenton.

Eleven Warrenton residents held 10 federal groundfish fishery permits in 2000. The number of residents holding permits in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab 2/18/1, groundfish 1/0/0, highly migratory species NA/0/1, salmon 1/34/0, shellfish 0/3/NA, shrimp 5/6/1, and other species 0/0/1.
In 2000 31 state and federal permits were registered to Warrenton residents. The number of permits held in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab 4/0/1, groundfish 3/0/0, highly migratory species NA/0/0, salmon 1/0/0, shellfish 0/0/NA, shrimp 9/0/2, and other species 0/0/1.17

There were at least four seafood processors operating in Warrenton in 2000: Bio-Oregon Inc., Oregon Ocean Seafoods, Pacific Coast Seafoods Company, and Warrenton Deep Sea Inc., owned by Bornstein’s Seafood of Astoria. These processors employed approximately 168 in 2000. In 2000 about 39,523,763 pounds of fish were processed at a value of $22,361,265. The top three processed products, in terms of pounds landed and revenue earned, were Dungeness crab, flounder, and shrimp. Whiting is processed nearby at the Point Adams Packing Company in Hammond.18 Fieldwork indicates many fishermen in Warrenton sell fish to processors in both Warrenton and Astoria. For more information on fish processors in the area, please see the Astoria community profile.

Sportfishing

In 2003 at least two outfitter guide businesses and two licensed charter vessel businesses were based in Warrenton. For the Astoria-Warrenton port complex, the 2000 recreational salmonid catch in the Ocean Boat Fishery was 766 Chinook and 13,712 coho salmon. The recreational nonsalmonid catch was a total of 1,533 fish; most were black rockfish.

Subsistence

Local community members may engage in subsistence fishing in the area, however specific information on subsistence fishing in Warrenton is not discussed in detail in this community profile due to the lack of available data. Tribal subsistence fishing does not occur in the Columbia River near Warrenton but further upstream in the Lower Columbia River dam pools at The Dalles, John Day, and Bonneville dams.19

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 Warrenton residents owned nine vessels that participated in North Pacific fisheries. Community members landed fish in the following North Pacific fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of landings/number of vessels landing): crab confidential/confidential/2, Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish confidential/confidential/2, finfish confidential/confidential/1, Gulf of Alaska groundfish 1,428.9 t/$590,250/4, halibut 404.1 t/$2,243,050/5, and salmon 71.7 t/$118,060/5.

In 2000 9 community residents held registered state permits and 18 held registered federal permits. Twenty-four Warrenton residents held crew member licenses for North Pacific fisheries.

A total of 26 state and federal permits were registered to individuals in Warrenton in 2000. Residents held three groundfish License Limitation Program permits. They held two crab, one finfish, seven BSAI groundfish, five halibut, and three salmon Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission permits in 2000. The halibut and sablefish individual fishing quota shares for people residing in the community in 2000 were 3,625,964 and 702,524 respectively.

Sportfishing

Warrenton residents purchased 42 Alaskan sportfishing licenses in 2000.

Notes

4. See note 1.
7. See note 6.
10. See note 9.
14. 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.
15. See note 9.
17. See note 14.

19. Field notes, fishery biologist, Oregon Department of Fish and Game, Astoria, OR, 26 April 2006.