

Westport

People and Place

Location

Westport is in southwest Washington on the southernmost peninsula known as Point Chehalis, which means “sand” in the Salish language.¹ Situated in Grays Harbor County, the city encompasses 7.12 square miles of land. The nearest major U.S. city is Seattle, a 130-mile drive northeast. Westport’s geographic coordinates are lat 46°53’25”N, long 124°06’10”W.

Demographic Profile

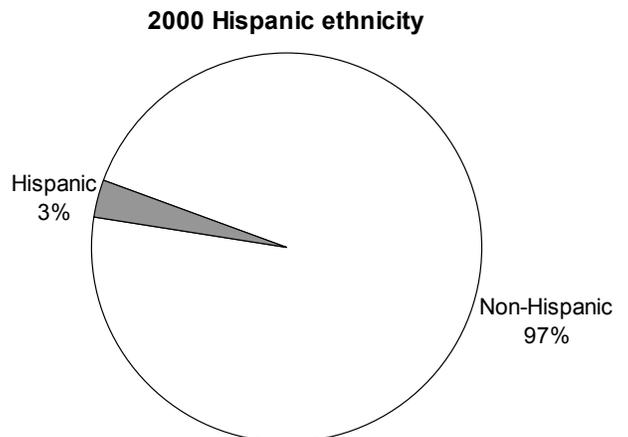
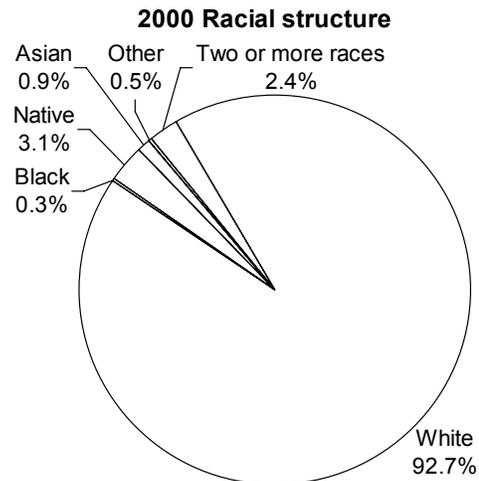
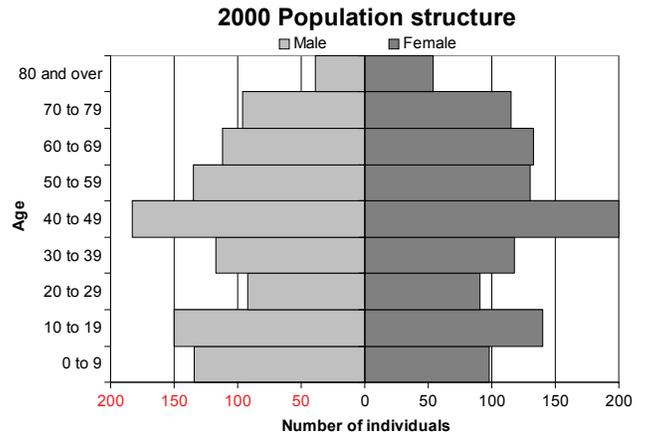
According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Westport’s population was 2,137, a 12.9% increase from 1990. The gender composition was 50.5% female and 49.5% male. The median age of 43.4 was higher than the national median of 35.3. In 2000 22% were under 18 years of age while 19.1% were 65 years of age or older.

Approximately 74% of Westport’s population was living in family households in 2000. Of the population over 18 years of age, 68.3% had a high school education (including equivalency) or higher, 9.5% had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 4.6% had attained a graduate or professional degree; the national averages were 79.7%, 22.3%, and 7.8% respectively.

The vast majority of Westport’s racial structure recorded by the 2000 U.S. Census was white (92.7%), followed by American Indian and Alaska Native (3.1%), people who identified with two or more races (2.4%), Asian (0.9%), people who identified with another race (0.5%), and black (0.3%). Only one person identified as a Pacific Islander. Ethnicity data indicate that 3% identified as Hispanic. In 2000 2.1% were foreign-born, with 52% from Mexico.

History

Prior to the arrival of the first Europeans, members of the Chehalis Tribe occupied Chehalis Point, the area now referred to as Westport. Other fishing camps and small settlements were used during various times of the year, but the main village was Chehalis Point, the sand spit on the south entrance to Grays Harbor. At one time, the village population numbered 5,000. The diet of the Chehalis consisted primarily of fish, including several species of salmon, sturgeon, bottomfish, crab, and razor clams. Historically members of the Quinault Nation and the nontreaty Indians of Shoalwater Bay, located to the north and south of Westport respectively, made their living partly by selling their surplus fishery resources to



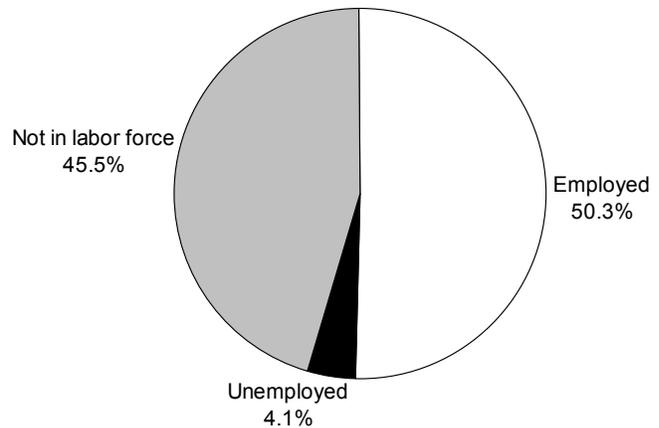
canneries,² some of which may have been based in Westport. In 1853 90% of the Chehalis Tribe and much of the culture, history, and heritage, was lost to the “big sick” epidemic, a disease characterized by extreme fevers.³

The Peterson family, the first European American settlers to permanently establish residence on Chehalis Point, arrived in 1857. The Chehalis Indians “lived in peace with the whites” who settled on the point despite uprisings that were taking place in neighboring areas.⁴ By the late 1870s the area was discovered to be a potential recreational area. Hotels were built, land was platted, and the harbor side was named Westport Beach. Because another town in Lewis County had already claimed the name Chehalis City, Chehalis Point became known as Peterson’s Point in the 1870s and in 1890 was renamed Westport.⁵

The first projects to help ships move safely in and out of the harbor occurred around the turn of the century. In 1897 a lifesaving station was opened and one year later Grays Harbor lighthouse began its service. In 1896 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began construction on the south jetty, which was completed in 1902. Commercial fishing started in the 1920s and the Westport dock was dedicated in 1929.⁶ In 1935 a reparation project began on the jetty and in 1939 when it was completed the jetty extended 2.5 miles into the sea.⁷ After World War II the cove was dredged, breakwaters installed, more mooring facilities were built in the marina, and in 1955 charter fishing began. By 1961 138 charter boats were fishing out of Westport. Over the next few seasons the number of registered charter vessels reached 250; the number of commercial fishing boats increased as well during this time. Fishing began to decline with the Boldt Decision in 1972, which gave American Indians the right to half of the fishery resources. Following the Boldt Decision, “fishing seasons were shortened and two fish per day were legal catches for those lucky enough to find them.”⁸ The fishing industry in Westport diversified in order to keep up with changing legislation and decreased salmon harvests. Today charter boats take locals and tourists whale and bird watching and fishing for bottomfish, salmon, and tuna. The commercial fishing fleet also has diversified; the catch now includes shrimp, Dungeness crab, tuna, other finfish species, and shellfish.⁹

Tourism has long been important to Westport’s economy. Participants in the Westport Grayland Chamber of Commerce-sponsored Boat Basin Fishing Derby, typically held in July, can win cash merchandise and prizes for the largest bottomfish, salmon, halibut, or tuna. Other fishing-related events include Westport’s Charter Association Fishing Derby in July, the Boat

2000 Employment structure



Basin Salmon Derby held in the fall, and the Blessing of the Fleet on Memorial Day weekend. Additional marine-related events in Westport include Rusty Scupper’s Pirate Daze, Maritime Museum’s Ole Fashion 4th of July Celebration, Brady’s World Famous Oyster Feed, the Crab Races, Feed, and Dance Derby, the Ocosta Oyster Feed, and the Annual Seafood Festival and Craft Show.¹⁰

Infrastructure

Current Economy

At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, 50.3% of Westport’s potential labor force 16 years of age and older were employed, 4.1% were unemployed, and the unemployment rate was 7.5% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). In addition, 45.5% were not in the labor force, compared to the national average of 36.1%. The major employment sectors were local, state, and federal governments (37.2%), management, professional, and related occupations (25.2%), and sales and office occupations (21.4%). Natural resource jobs including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed 10.8% in 2000, but this percentage may be artificially low given that many fishermen are self-employed and are underrepresented in these data.

Westport’s economy also relies on commercial and charter fishing, shellfish harvesting, seafood processing, tourism, and wood processing. The Weyerhaeuser Company in Aberdeen is Grays Harbor County’s largest employer, employing and contracting more than 2,000 workers.¹¹ More recently boat building also has become an important part of Westport’s economic base.¹² The Westport Shipyard, founded in 1964, specializes in fiberglass hulled yachts and small craft. The shipyard employs more than 350 people and is the largest fiberglass luxury yacht builder in the county.¹³

The per capita income in 1999 was \$17,362 and the median household income was \$32,037. In 1999 14.3% lived below the poverty level, slightly higher than the national average of 12.4%. In 2000 there were 1,358 housing units in Westport, with 65% owner occupied and 35% renter occupied. The housing unit vacancy rate was 27.6%, with 49.3% vacant due to seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

Governance

Incorporated in 1914, the City of Westport is one of four municipalities in Grays Harbor County.¹⁴ The city has a mayor-council form of government, with the populace electing a mayor and five council members. Grays Harbor County, including Westport, levies an 8.3% sales and use tax and a 3% lodging tax. See the Governance subsection (page 43) in the Overview section for a more detailed discussion of taxes affecting fisherman and processors in Washington.

The nearest National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Office and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office are in Seattle. Meetings of the Pacific Fishery Management and North Pacific Fishery Management councils are routinely held in the Seattle-Tacoma area. The closest Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Regional Office is 30 miles west in Montesano. The U.S. Coast Guard Station (USCG) Grays Harbor is in Westport at the entrance to Grays Harbor, guarding Grays Harbor bar, one of the most hazardous bars in the Pacific Northwest. The USCG station has four vessels and is responsible for marine safety between Queets River and Ocean Park and from Preacher's Slough to 50 nautical miles offshore.

Facilities

Westport is accessible by ground, sea, and air. The main roads connecting Westport to neighboring communities include Washington Highway 105 east to Aberdeen, 22 miles east, and Washington Highway 105 south to Raymond, 25 miles southeast. During the spring and summer months, a passenger-only ferry capable of holding 95 passengers operates between Westport and Ocean Shores to the north. The Westport Airport, available for public use, has one runway and is immediately adjacent to the harbor, 1 mile north of Westport. The nearest airport certified for carrier operations is 54 miles south in Astoria, Oregon. The Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is the closest major facility.

Westport is in the Ocosta School District, which has an elementary school and a junior/senior high school. Grays Harbor College in Aberdeen is the nearest college.

Evergreen State College in Olympia, 80 miles east, is the nearest four-year college. Grays Harbor Public Utility District is the primary electricity supplier. The City of Westport's Wastewater Treatment Plant and Water Department handle sewer and water services. The Westport Police and Fire departments administer public safety. The Beach Clinic Inc. in Westport is the nearest medical facility. The Grays Harbor Community Hospital is in Aberdeen. The tourism industry in Westport is fairly developed with approximately 34 motels located within the city.

There are several community-oriented businesses in Westport, including the Westport/South Beach Historical Society's Maritime Museum, Westport/South Beach Senior House, the Westport Timberland Library, and several places of worship. The Maritime Museum, in the marina district, serves to entertain and educate adults and children on the history of the area, including local efforts in whaling, fishing, and cranberry growing. The University of Washington School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences also has a staging facility in Westport, from which research is conducted on the Willapa Bay estuary. There are several nonprofit organizations based in Westport that focus on fishery-related issues, including Friends of Grays Harbor, a volunteer citizen's group made up of crabbers, fishermen, oyster growers, and citizens, dedicated to fostering and promoting the economic, biological, and social uniqueness of a healthy Grays Harbor estuary.¹⁵

According to Westport Marina, their facility is the largest coastal marina in the Pacific Northwest and is home to Washington State's largest charter fishing fleet.¹⁶ With a 650-vessel moorage capacity (for vessels up to 200 feet) the marina offers boat manufacturing and repair services, refrigerated shore side processing facilities, and vessel supplies. Westport also has two retail stores specializing in marine and fishery supplies.

Net pens for rearing Humptulips River coho salmon are located in the Westport Marina and are operated jointly by WDFW, Ocosta High School, the Kiwanis Club, and the Port of Westport. The net pens are positioned inside boat slips at the marina and when the salmon return to spawn, anglers can be found crowding the Westport Boat Basin. Brady's Oysters, a family owned and operated business spanning four generations, grows oysters on suspended culture, a unique method developed by Brady Engvall in the early 1970s to keep the oysters out of the mud. Brady's grows its oysters in the Elk River Estuary in the south bay of Grays Harbor.¹⁷

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Of the 894 unique vessels that delivered nonconfidential landings to Westport in 2000, 298 were commercial vessels, 75 were tribal commercial vessels, and 73 were personal use vessels. Landings in the community were in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represent landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): coastal pelagic 631 t/\$100,067/9; crab 2,446 t/\$12,035,331/210; groundfish 8,305 t/\$2,436,247/74, highly migratory species 1,101 t/\$2,062,081/73; salmon 68 t/\$189,609/69; shellfish 5 t/\$20,201/18; shrimp 1,370 t/\$1,322,023/33; and other species (32 t/\$110,428/44).

Westport residents owned 179 vessels in 2000, 58 of which participated in the federally managed groundfish fishery. Community members owned two vessels that participated in the groundfish vessel buyback program. The number that participated in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic 4/0/0, crab 50/2/1, groundfish 12/0/NA, highly migratory species NA/0/NA, salmon 42/19/3, shellfish NA/1/NA, shrimp NA/6/1, and other species 21/0/0.¹⁸

Ten Westport residents held 10 federally managed groundfish fishery permits in 2000. The number holding permits in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic 3/0/0, crab 45/3/1, highly migratory species NA/0/0, salmon 32/17/6, shellfish 12/1/NA, shrimp 20/6/2, and other species 8/0/2.¹⁹

In 2000 Westport residents held 203 state and federal permits. The number of permits held by these community members in each said fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: coastal pelagic 4/0/0, crab 70/6/1, highly migratory species NA/0/0, salmon 45/0/9, shellfish 12/0/NA, shrimp 22/10/3, and other species 9/0/2.²⁰

The commercial anchovy fishery in Washington operates out of Ilwaco (80 miles south) and Westport with seasonal gear restrictions. Within coastal waters, anchovy harvest is allowed year round and may be caught using lampara and purse seines. Anchovy catches from Westport are taken predominantly from Grays Harbor, although some of the landings are made from the nearshore coastal area.²¹ Westport residents also are involved in the West Coast sardine fishery. In 2000 10.7 million pounds of sardines, a prolific coastal pelagic species, were landed in Washington State. The majority of the catch (approximately 80%) was landed in Ilwaco; however processors in Westport purchased the majority of the remaining catch.

There were at least three seafood processors operating in Westport in 2000: Washington Crab

Producers (WCP) Inc., Ocean Gold Seafoods Inc. (formerly Merino's Seafood Inc.), and Westport Seafood Exchange (WSE) Inc. These processors employed approximately 154 individuals. Processed products include Dungeness crab, pacific hake, shrimp, and anchovies. The estimated total weight and value of their processed products in 2000 is confidential. WCP was owned and operated as a cooperative until Pacific Seafood Group acquired the company in 1993. Ocean Gold Seafoods is the largest processor of Pacific whiting on the West Coast. Known for the catching and selling of bait anchovies, WSE facilitates dockside unloading of live product to wholesalers and distributors. WSE's additional services include a 120-ton ice storage capacity, a 170-foot moorage dock, a large gear storage yard, and free bait lockers.²² Other businesses involved in seafood retail include Brady's Oysters seafood farm and market and D&M Live Crab.

Several tribes along the West Coast participate in commercial fishing; however scant data exists on tribal commercial fishing in the Westport area. Pacific Coast treaty tribes include the Hoh, Makah, and Quileute Indian tribes, and the Quinault Indian Nation. The closest treaty Indian nation to Westport is the Quinault, with a tribal center 70 miles north in Taholah in Grays Harbor County. According to the Boldt Decision,²³ the Quinault's usual and accustomed fishing area includes the following rivers and streams: Clearwater, Queets, Salmon, Quinault, Raft, Moclips, Copalis, and Joe Creek. Ocean fisheries are utilized in the waters adjacent to their territory, between Destruction Island and Point Chehalis.²⁴ The closest nontreaty tribe is the Shoalwater Bay Tribe, located 30 miles south in Tokeland, on the north end of Willapa Bay in Pacific County. To help pay for tribal natural resource management programs, tribes collect taxes from tribal members who sell fish and shellfish. The nearby Shoalwater Bay Tribe and the Quinault Indian Nation most likely compete for similar fishery resources as nontribal fishermen fishing out of Westport.

Sportfishing

Sport fishermen in Westport are involved in the West Coast and Alaskan fisheries. In 2000 14 salmonid charter fishing operators serviced sport fishermen and tourists. At least 23 salmonid charter fishing business operated in Westport in 2003. There is one licensed agent selling fishing permits in Westport. In 2003 there were 5,525 sportfishing license transactions in Westport valued at \$61,021. In Catch Record Card Area 2 (Westport-Ocean Shores) the 2000–2001 sport catch, based on creel survey estimates, was 34,636 fish including 6,254 Chinook salmon and 28,382 coho

salmon. Marine anglers made 19,895 trips in the sport salmon fishery. Sport fishermen in Area 2 caught eight steelhead. In 2000 the coastal bottomfish catch for Area 2 was 152,675 and the Pacific halibut catch for Area 1 (Ilwaco) and Area 2 was 2,341.

Due to the downturn in the salmon fishery, whale watching and fishing for bottomfish and tuna are replacing salmon fishing, previously the most popular charter trip; fieldwork indicates that tuna fishing is particularly popular among the charter industry. In the spring, whale-watching trips leave from Westport to view the California Grey whales as they journey from Baja, Mexico, to their northern feeding grounds in the Bering and Chukchi seas.²⁵

Subsistence

Subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering activities are fundamental to the way of life of some coastal community members. Today members of the Quinault Indian Nation, the Shoalwater Bay Tribe, and other nontribal subsistence fishermen obtain fishery resources from the waters surrounding Westport. 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

Westport residents owned 10 vessels in 2000 that were involved in North Pacific fisheries. 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): finfish confidential/confidential/1 and salmon 238 t/\$225,180/6.

In 2000 Westport residents held 21 state and federal registered permits, with 12 individuals holding state permits and 7 individuals holding federal permits (note: it is possible for individuals to hold more than one permit at a time). Westport residents held one crab and six groundfish License Limitation Program permits and one crab, one Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish, one Gulf of Alaska groundfish, two herring, seven salmon, and two shellfish Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission permits. Westport residents held 77,433 halibut individual fishing quota shares in 2000.

In 2000 56 Westport residents held crew member licenses for North Pacific fisheries.

Sportfishing

Westport residents purchased 36 Alaska sportfishing licenses in 2000.

Notes

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4. See note 3.
5. The Chehalis River Council. 2004. Selective chronology of the Chehalis Basin. Online at <http://www.crcwater.org/issues2/chronicle.html> [accessed 31 January 2007].
6. Buccaneer Tours and Charters. 2003. History of the Grays Harbor area. Online at <http://www.buccaneertours.com/hist2.html> [accessed 31 January 2007].
7. See note 3.
8. See note 3.
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20. See note 18.
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