Demographics of Commercial Fishing Communities in Alaska

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One hundred and thirty-six Alaskan communities were selected as the Alaska communities most involved in commercial fishing based on quantitative indicators of commercial fishing in the year 2000. Baseline socioeconomic profiles of these communities were compiled by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center. An analysis of the communities’ demographics and their involvement in fishing shows that commercial fishing activities are most substantial in a small number of key hub communities with shoreside processing capacity. But many more communities, both large and small, have a significant level of fisheries involvement. Fishing activities (commercial, recreational and subsistence) help shape the people and their communities.

Community Size
Over half of the Alaska communities most involved in commercial fishing (of those that are recognized as U.S. Census places) had a population of fewer than 400. Ninety-seven percent had a population of fewer than 12,000. In Alaska a city must have at least 400 permanent residents to become incorporated as a First Class City; 25 voters are required for incorporation as a Second Class City.

Age and Gender
Two most common characteristic population structures of the Alaska communities most involved in commercial fishing are:

- the labor shape, which shows a bulge of working age (20-60) males, characteristic of communities with processors, and
- the family shape, which shows a family structure with a nearly equal number of men and women, and relatively more children and elders. This structure is common in Native communities of the Bering Sea.

Commercial Fishing
In the communities most involved in commercial fishing in the year 2000, the number of crew members residing in a community ranged from zero to 1388 crew members, with a mean of 38 crew members and an average of 102 crew members per community. The total number of registered commercial fishing permits held by community members ranged from zero to 5569 permits, with a median of 53 and an average of 143 permits per profiled community. 979,327 tons of fish worth $703.9 million was landed in 54 of the communities which operated 131 processors. Almost 99% of this fish was processed in the top ten communities for landings. Dutch Harbor, Akutan, Kodiak, Sand Point, King Cove, Ketchikan, Cordova, Petersburg, Naknek, and Seward. The same ten communities top the list for value of landings.

Race and Ethnicity
The Alaska communities most involved in commercial fishing are largely Alaska Native and/or White in racial and ethnic make-up. On average they have low percentages of Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic residents. Some communities with commercial fish processors tend to have a higher percentage of racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Asian or Hispanic community members (seen as the upper range boundary below). By contrast, many of the profiled Native communities have maintained relatively stable populations since the beginning of the U.S. Census data.

Sport Fishing
Ninety-six or 71% of the Alaska communities most involved in commercial fishing sold sport fishing licenses in the year 2000, with a range from 1 license sold (Egegik, Kingigianak, Mansokokan, and Saint Paul) to 98,516 licenses sold (Anchorage) in a specific community. Licenses were sold to both tourists and residents. The licenses sold in the profiled communities equal approximately 94% of the licenses sold statewide.

Subsistence Fishing
The majority of Alaskan communities participate in subsistence harvesting to some degree. Detailed information on subsistence was available for only 95 (69.9%) of the communities profiled. The below table shows the top ten communities by per capita harvest of subsistence resources. Nine of the ten are located in Southwest Alaska, where communities are remote and further removed from the economic activities and commercial distribution networks of urban centers.

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*Sepez, J., B. Tilt, C. Package, H. Lazrus, and I. Vaccaro. 2005. Community Profiles for North Pacific Fisheries – Alaska. Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or the National Marine Fisheries Service. represent the views or official position of the Department of Commerce, the National...