Elfin Cove

People and Place

Location

Elfin Cove lies on the northern shore of Chichagof Island near the entrance of the Inside Passage. To the north across Icy Strait are Glacier Bay National Park, Brady Glacier, and the Fairweather Mountain Range which forms one of the most spectacular scenes in Southeast Alaska. The area encompasses 10.7 square miles of land and 0.1 square miles of water.

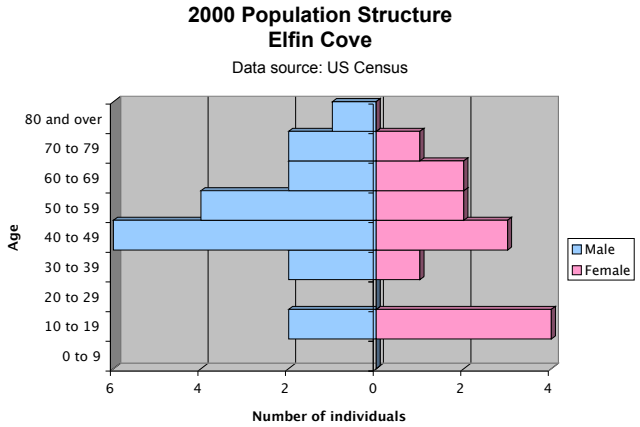
Demographic Profile

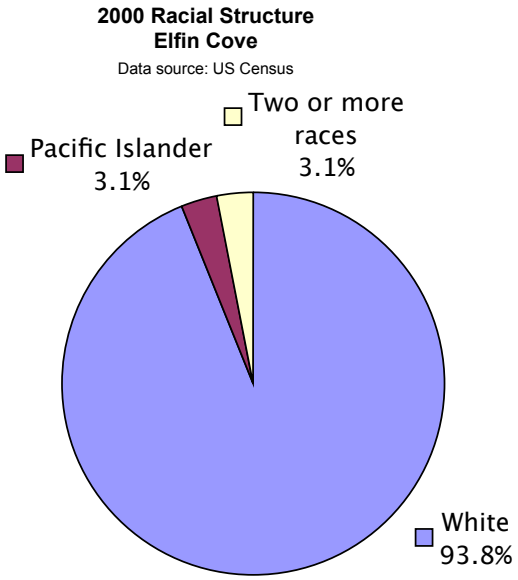
According to the 2000 U. S. Census, the population of Elfin Cove was 32. Population numbers have fluctuated between 30 and 60 over the past four decades since Census records began for the area; however, summers tend to increase the population to well over 200. There were more males (59.4% of the population) than females (40.6% of the population) in Elfin Cove according to data from the 2000 U.S Census. The racial composition of the population in 2000 was predominantly White (93.8%) and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (3.1%). Overall, 3.1% of the population identified with two or more races. None of the population recognized themselves as all or part Alaska Native or American Indian and none of the population identified as Hispanic. The median age was 47.5 years, which is considerably higher than the national median of 35.3 for the same year. According to the 2000 U.S. Census only18.8% of the population was under 19 years of age while 34.5% of the population was over 55 years of age.

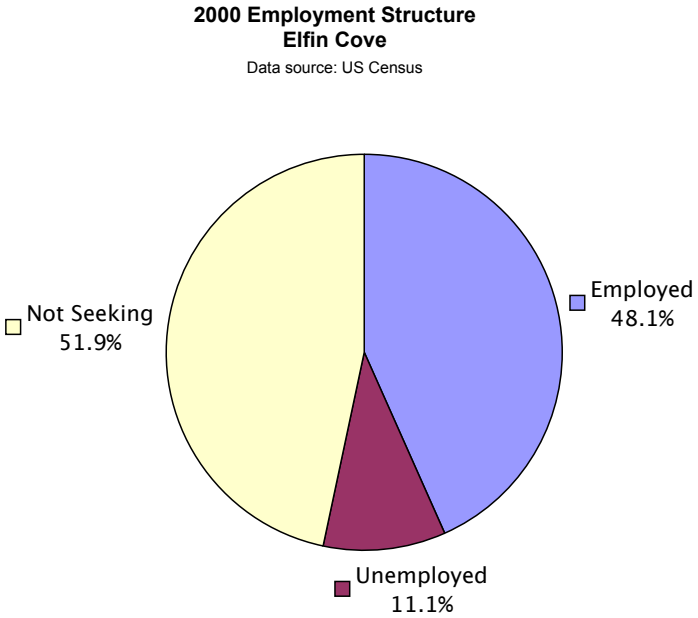
There were 35 housing units in Elfin Cove, 20 of which were designated vacant in 2000 and of these, 10 were vacant due to seasonal use. At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, none of the population lived in group quarters. All 100% of the population over 25 years of age had a high school diploma or higher according to the 2000 U.S. Census data while 43.5% also had a bachelor's degree or higher.

History

Elfin Cove was named after the boat of one of its regular fishermen. Originally referred to within the industry and locally as "Gunkhole" by fishermen anchoring here, its safe anchorage and proximity to the Fairweather fishing grounds made this a natural spot for fish buyers and supplies and a post office was







established there in 1935. A second dock, a warehouse, store, and restaurant were built in the 1940s and now a boardwalk runs through the town. Little information is available about the Tlingit occupation of the area; however, according to local residents, the Tlingits who visited the harbor would not remain throughout the winter because of the "evil spirits" there.

The troll fishery on which the community relies has long been on the decline, and Elfin Cove has suffered as a result. In 1997 the population was reported as 54, but the Census-takers in 2000 recorded only 32 residents. In December of 2002 the Wards Cove packaging plant which comprised the majority of the economy was shut down and now only 11 residents currently live in the community.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

The economy of Elfin Cove pivots around fish-buying and selling of fishing supplies. The economy is intimately linked to the local and national commercial fishing industries and sport fishing is also significant. These factors make the economy highly seasonal, including the employment provided by lodges and retail businesses in the summer. A total of 48 commercial fishing permits were held by 25 permit holders in 2000 according to the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission.

At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, 48.1% of the potential labor force was employed and there was an 11.1% unemployment rate. A seemingly high 51.9% of the population over 16 years of age was not in the labor force, though this may be explained by the intensely seasonal nature of the fishing industry, and 5.6% of the population was below the poverty level. The median household income in the same year was $33,750 and the per capita income was $15,089.

Governance

Elfin Cove is an unincorporated city which does not lie within an organized Alaskan borough. For official purposes, Elfin Cove is located in the Sitka recording district. Because of Elfin Cove's status as an unincorporated city there are no city or borough officials in the city nor are there municipal or borough finances dispersed to the community. Elfin Cove is not a member of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). It therefore has no land allotment under the Act, and is not a federally recognized Native village, nor does it have a Native village corporation or belong to a regional Native corporation.

The nearest National Marine Fisheries Service Regional Office is in Juneau, as is the nearest Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The nearest Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services is located in Skagway.

Facilities

Elfin Cove is accessible by air and by sea; the Alaska State Ferry stops at nearby Pelican. A roundtrip flight from Juneau on the daily mail plane costs about $200. From Juneau a roundtrip flight to Anchorage costs approximately $200. A State-owned seaplane base is available. Moorage for 25 marine vessels is available. Skiffs are the primary means of local transportation. Freight and supplies are delivered by plane or boat.

Water in Elfin Cove is individually collected from surface supplies, although the available sources contain high levels of bacteria and giardia and a treated water source is badly needed. Funding is also needed to replace individual septic tanks and leachfields with a community sewage collection system. About half the residences are fully plumbed. No landfill is currently available and residents use an unregulated refuse burn area on the tidelands. The community has expressed interest in an incinerator. A hydroelectric project has been engineered by Elfin Cove Electric Utility which also uses diesel for some of the energy supply. There are neither local health nor public safety services, although Elfin does have a fire department. Elfin Cove is within the Chatham Schools District, although there are no schools located directly in the community. Services include a post office, store, laundromat (operated by Pelican Seafoods), and several inns.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing, like sport fishing, is important to the economy of Elfin Cove. According to the Department of Fish and Game, and reported by the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission 48 permits were held by 25 permit holders but only 31 permits were fished in Elfin Cove in 2000. There were 8 vessel owners in the federal fisheries, 18 vessel owners in the salmon fishery and overall 18 crew members claiming residence in Elfin Cove in 2000. The

commercial vessel fleet delivering landings to Elfin Cove consisted of eight vessels in the salmon industry (in accordance with confidentiality regulations, landings data for the community are unavailable).

Commercial fishing permits are issued according to specifications of species, vessel size, gear type and fishing area. Permits issued in Elfin Cove for 2000 were for halibut, sablefish, other groundfish, crab, and salmon.

Halibut: There were a total of 12 permits issued for halibut in Elfin Cove in 2000, nine of which were fished. Permits for halibut pertained to one hand troll, eight longline vessels under 60 feet (six permits were fished) and three longline vessels over 60 feet (two permits were fished). All permits designated for halibut were for statewide waters.

Sablefish: Three permits were issued in Elfin Cove for the sablefish fishery in 2000, all of which were fished). These permits pertained to three longline vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters.

Other groundfish: Three permits were issued in Elfin Cove for other groundfish, none of which were fished. Permits pertained to two miscellaneous saltwater finfish longline vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters (neither were fished) and one demersal shelf rockfish longline vessel over 60 feet in Southeast waters.

Crab: Three permits were issued in Elfin Cove for crab in 2000, none of which were fished. One permit pertained to Dungeness crab ring nets in Southeast waters (not fished), one Dungeness crab permit for 150 pots or 50% of the maximum in Southeast waters (not fished), and one permit for Tanner crab ring nets in Southeast waters (not fished).

Salmon: A total of 27 permits were issued in Elfin Cove in 2000 for the salmon fishery, 17 of which were fished. Salmon permits pertained to seven hand trolls in statewide waters (two permits were fished) and 20 power gurdy trolls in statewide waters (17 permits were fished).

In 2000 a small processor was in operation as well as a larger Wards Cove Packing Company facility. With the withdrawal of Wards Cove Packing Company from many places in Southeast Alaska, it remains to be seen what the long term impact will be on the processor facilities at Elfin Cove. Elfin Cove did not receive federal salmon disaster funds to compensate for consequent losses of salmon taxes or raw fish taxes.

Sport Fishing

There were 15 saltwater sport fishing businesses registered in Elfin Cove in 2002 and 13 businesses licensed to provide freshwater recreational fishing according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. There were a total of 1,025 sport fishing licenses sold in Elfin Cove in 2000, 51 of which were sold to Alaska residents.

Subsistence Fishing

Numerous social, economic, and technological changes have influenced life in Alaskan fishing communities and subsistence harvests and practices continue to provide fishing communities with important nutritional, economic, social and cultural requirements. Data from 1987 compiled on behalf of the Division of Subsistence of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game provides useful information about subsistence practices in Elfin Cove. Records describe the subsistence patterns for 100% of the households that participated in the use of subsistence resources, including harvesting, sharing, and consuming resources, illustrating the importance of subsistence to life in the community. Of the total population, 100% used salmon and 92.3% used non-salmon fish (herring, herring roe, smelt, cod, flounder, halibut, rockfish, and char); no households used marine mammals and a high percentage, 92.3%, used marine invertebrates.

The average per capita harvest for 1987 was 262.53 lbs. The composition of the total subsistence harvest can be shown by the percentages of the resources which demonstrate the amount of each resource category used by the community relative to other resources categories. The total subsistence harvest was composed of 30.67% salmon, non-salmon fish made up 22.34%, land mammals 27.53%, marine mammals 0%, birds and eggs 0%, marine invertebrates for 8.99% and vegetation made up 10.46%. The wild food harvest in Elfin Cove made up 170% of the recommended dietary allowance of protein in 1987 (corresponding to a daily allowance of 49g of protein per day or 0.424 lbs of wild food per day) (Wolfe, Division of Subsistence, Alaska Department of Fish and Game).

No permits were held by households in Elfin Cove for subsistence fishing of salmon according to Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence records from 1999. Residents of Elfin Cove and

members of the Seldovia Village Tribe, an Alaska Native Tribe, who hold a valid Subsistence Halibut Registration Certificate (SHARC) issued by NMFS, are eligible to harvest subsistence halibut. These allocations are based on recognized customary and traditional uses of halibut. Regulations to implement subsistence halibut fishing were published in the Federal Register in April 2003 and became effective May 2003.