Homer

People and Place

Location

Homer is a first-class city located on the southwestern edge of the Kenai Peninsula, in the Kenai Peninsula Borough. It encompasses 10.6 square miles of land and 11.9 square miles of water.

Demographic Profile

As a result of the recent boom in the commercial and sport fishing industries, the population of Homer has tripled since 1960. In 2000, the community had 3,946 residents in 1,599 households. A small proportion of the population (106 people, or 2.7%) live in group quarters. The gender composition of the community is relatively equal, at 49.4% male and 50.6% female. The racial makeup of Homer is as follows: White 90.5%, Alaska Native or American Indian (4.2%), Black (0.3%), Asian (0.9%), Hawaiian Native (0.1%), other (0.7%), and two or more races (3.1%). A total of 6.2% of the population recognized themselves as all or part Alaska Native or American Indian. Residents of Hispanic origin make up 2.4% of the population. The median age in Homer is 38.8 years, slightly older than the U.S. national average of 35.3.

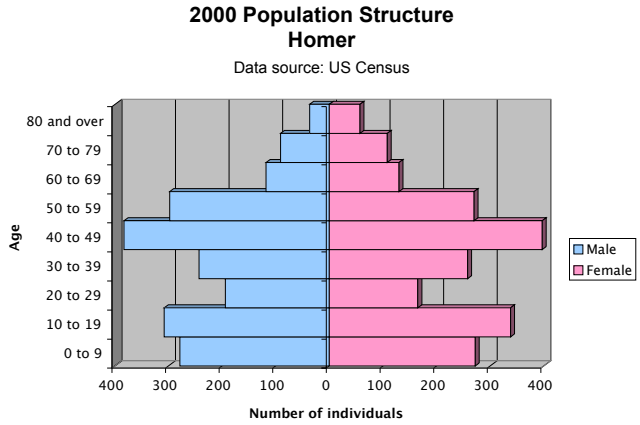
History

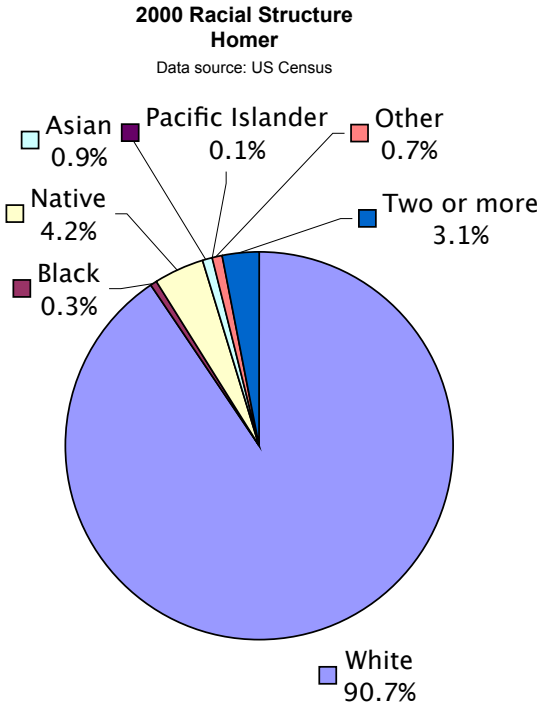
Kenaitze Indians, so named by early Russian fur traders, have occupied the Homer area for thousands of years. The area is historically considered to be Dena'ina Athabascan Indian territory, although archaeological sites on Kachemak Bay suggest the presence of Pacific Eskimo or Alutiiq people as early as 4,500 years ago (Halliday 1998: 183). The modern community of Homer was named for Homer Pennock, a gold mining company promoter, who arrived in 1896 with a crew of 50 men. Since that time, Homer's economy has depended upon natural resource industries such as coal and oil.

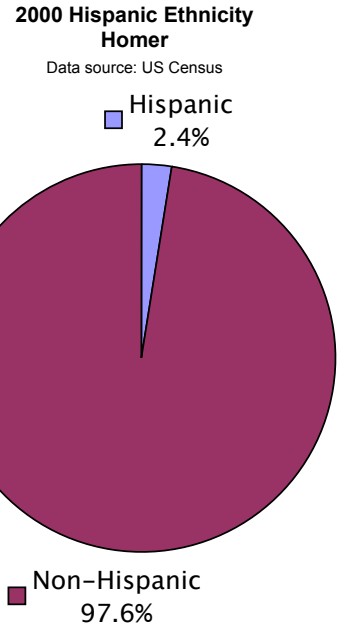
Infrastructure

Current Economy

The economy of Homer is dominated by the commercial and sport fishing industries. Fish processing is also a significant factor in the local economy, as are marine-related trades, welding, canvas work, and electronics. Tourism is a growing industry in

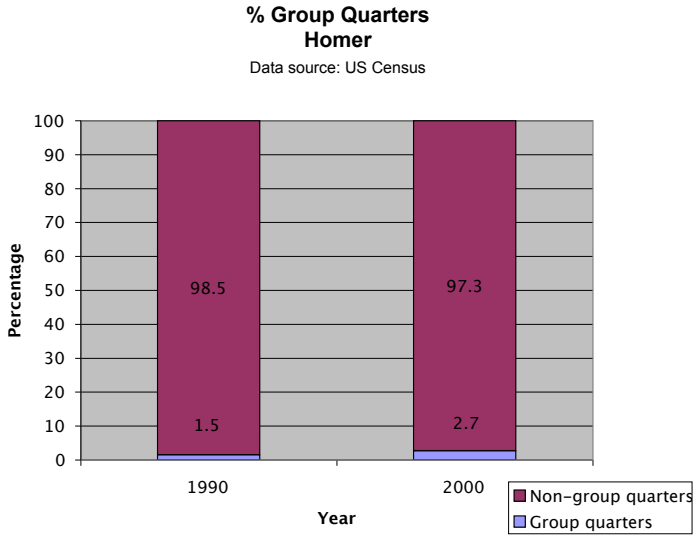






Homer; in recent years, the city has developed a small but growing artist community. The South Peninsula Hospital, located in Homer, is a major source of employment. Because of the city's dependence on fishing, the population swells during the summer months as seasonal laborers come to take advantage of jobs in fishing, fish processing, and related activities.

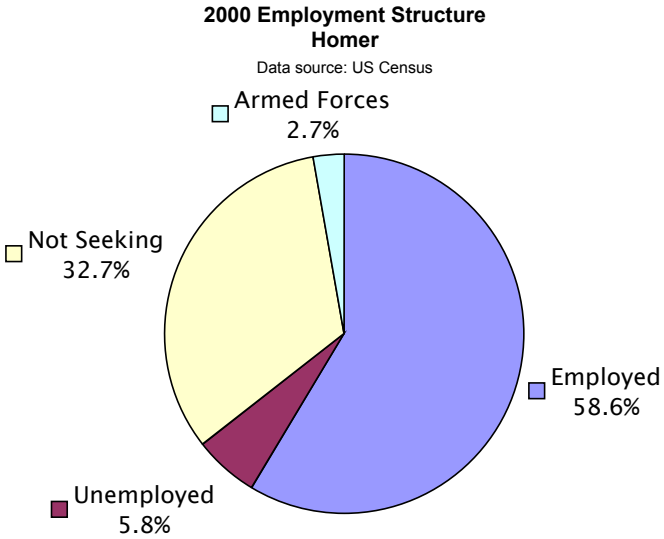
The median annual per capita income in 2000 was $21,823, and the median household income was $42,821. Approximately 5.8% of the total potential labor force was unemployed, and 32.7% of residents aged 16 and older were not in the labor force (i.e. not employed and not seeking work). Approximately 9.3% of residents lived below the poverty level



Governance

Homer was incorporated in 1964 and has a manager form of government. The city is in the Kenai Peninsula Borough. Government revenues come from a 3.5% sales tax administered by the city, and a 2% sales tax administered by the borough. There is also a 0.69% (or 6.85 mill) property tax administered by the city and a 0.65% (or 6.5 mill) property tax administered by the borough.

There is a National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) office and an Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) office located in Homer. The nearest office of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) is located in Anchorage.



Facilities

Homer is accessible by air from many of Alaska's cities, and by road via the Sterling Highway. The city-owned airport has a 6,700 foot paved runway, as well as a seaplane base. Roundtrip airfare from Homer to Anchorage is $175. There is also a deep-water dock capable of accommodating 340 foot-long vessels and a boat harbor with moorage for 920 vessels.

Major utilities, including water, sewer, and electricity, are provided by the city. Electricity comes from the Bradley Lake Hydroelectric Plant and from a gas turbine plant located in Soldotna. The city also provides police and volunteer fire services. The city operates eight cranes at the docks for fish landings. There are eight schools located in Homer, including three elementary schools, one middle school, two high schools, and two multi-grade academies. There are a total of 101 teachers and 1,452 students in the local schools.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing, particularly in the halibut, salmon, and groundfish fisheries, is a major part of the economy of Homer. In 2000, there were 132 vessel owners with operations in federal fisheries and 262 vessel owners with operations in state fisheries who resided in Homer. There were 759 registered crew members. In 2000, 539 Homer residents held a total of 1,150 commercial fishing permits. The following section describes the permits in detail by fishery group, gear, and vessel type.

Crab: Fifty-nine residents held a total of 75 commercial permits in the crab fishery, and 27 of these permits were fished. A detailed breakdown of crab permits is as follows: 41 Dungeness crab pot gear

permits for vessels over 60 feet in Cook Inlet (none fished), one Korean hair crab pot gear permit for vessels over 60 feet in the Bering Sea (none fished), three King crab pot gear permit for vessels under 60 feet in Norton Sound (two fished), one pot gear permit for red, blue, brown, king, and Tanner crab in the southeast region (one fished), one king crab pot gear permit for vessels over 60 feet in Dutch Harbor (one fished), two king crab pot gear permits for vessels over 60 feet in the Bering Sea (none fished), 12 king crab pot gear permit for vessels over 60 feet in Bristol Bay (11 fished), 13 Tanner crab pot gear permits for vessels over 60 feet in the Bering Sea (11 fished), and one Tanner crab pot gear permit, issued to the Bering Sea Community Development Quota, for vessels over 60 feet in the Bering Sea (one fished).

Other Shellfish: Twenty-three residents held a total of 26 permits for other shellfish, and 10 permits were fished. A detailed breakdown of the permits is as follows: one octopus/squid longline permit for vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters (none fished), 3 octopus/squid pot gear permits for vessels over 60 feet in statewide waters (one fished), 2 shrimp pot gear permits for vessels under 60 feet in Prince William Sound (none fished), 2 shrimp pot gear permits for vessels over 60 feet in the westward region (none fished), 3 sea cucumber diving gear permits for statewide waters excluding the southeast region (two fished); 13 clam shovel permits for statewide waters (6 fished), one sea urchin diving gear permit for statewide waters, excluding the southeast region (none fished), and one scallop dredge permit for statewide waters (one fished).

Halibut: One hundred ninety-seven residents held a total of 210 commercial halibut permits, and 167 permits were fished. A detailed breakdown of the permits is as follows: 8 halibut hand troll permits for statewide waters (2 fished), 136 halibut longline permits for vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters (114 fished), 10 halibut mechanical jig permits for statewide waters (2 fished), and 56 halibut longline permits for vessels over 60 feet in statewide waters (49 fished).

Herring: Eighty-one residents held a total of 133 commercial permits in the herring fishery, and 42 permits were fished. A detailed breakdown of the permits is as follows: 4 herring roe purse seine permits for the southeast region (four fished), 17 herring roe purse seine permits for Prince William Sound (none fished), 20 herring roe purse seine permits for Cook Inlet (none fished), 10 herring roe purse seine permits for the Kodiak fishery (two fished), 3 herring roe purse seine permits for the Alaska Peninsula (none fished), 27 herring roe purse seine permits for Bristol Bay (21 fished); seven herring roe gillnet permits for the Kodiak fishery (one fished, six herring roe gillnet permits for Security Cove (3 fished), 9 herring roe gillnet permits for Bristol Bay (4 fished), one herring roe gillnet permits for Nunivak Island (one fished), 8 herring roe gillnet permits for Norton Sound (4 fished), 3 herring bait purse seine permits for the Alaska Peninsula (2 fished), 3 herring roe dive/hand pick permits for Bristol Bay (none fished), and 15 herring roe kelp spawn permits for Prince William Sound (none fished).

Sablefish: Seventy-one residents held a total of 81 commercial permits for the sablefish fishery, and 58 permits were fished. A detailed breakdown of the permits is as follows: 53 sablefish longline permits for vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters (40 fished), one sablefish mechanical jig permit for statewide waters (none fished), 8 sablefish fixed gear permit for vessels under 50 feet in Prince William Sound (one fished), one sablefish fixed gear permit for vessels under 35 feet for Prince William Sound (none fished), 2 sablefish longline permits for vessels over 60 feet in the northern southeast region (3 fished), and 16 sablefish longline permits for vessels over 60 feet in statewide waters (14 fished).

Other Groundfish: One hundred eighty-four residents held a total of 274 commercial permits in the groundfish fishery, and 113 permits were fished. A detailed breakdown of the permits is as follows: two lingcod hand troll permits for statewide waters (none fished), 5 lingcod longline permits for vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters (none fished), 29 lingcod mechanical jig permits for statewide waters (13 fished), 5 miscellaneous saltwater finfish hand troll permits for statewide waters (one fished), 96 miscellaneous saltwater finfish longline permits for vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters (44 fished), 2 miscellaneous saltwater finfish otter trawl permits for statewide waters (2 fished), 23 miscellaneous saltwater finfish pot gear permits for vessels under 60 feet in statewide waters (8 fished), 67 miscellaneous saltwater finfish mechanical jig permits for statewide waters (20 fished), 18 miscellaneous saltwater finfish longline permits for vessels over 60 feet in statewide waters (9 fished), 24

miscellaneous saltwater finfish pot gear permits for vessels over 60 feet in statewide waters (16 fished), one demersal shelf rockfish mechanical jig permit in the southeast region (none fished), and two demersal shelf rockfish longline permit for vessels over 60 feet in the southeast region (none fished).

Salmon: Three hundred thirty-four residents held a total of 350 commercial permits in the salmon fishery, and 291 permits were fished. A detailed breakdown of these permits is as follows: one salmon purse seine permit for the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands (one fished), 2 salmon beach seine permits for the Kodiak fishery (none fished), 41 salmon drift gillnet permits for Prince William Sound (41 fished), 102 salmon drift gillnet permits for Cook Inlet (92 fished), 21 salmon drift gillnet permits for the Alaska Peninsula (22 fished), 46 salmon drift gillnet permits for the Bristol Bay fishery (50 fished), one salmon set gillnet permit for Yakutat (none fished), 2 salmon set gillnet permits for Prince William Sound (2 fished), 23 salmon set gillnet permits for Cook Inlet (17 fished), one salmon set gillnet permit for the Kodiak fishery (none fished), 2 salmon set gillnet permits for Prince William Sound (2 fished), 23 salmon set gillnet permits for Cook Inlet (17 fished), one salmon set gillnet permits for the Kodiak fishery (two fished), one salmon set gillnet permit for the Alaska Peninsula (one fished), 19 salmon set gillnet permits for Bristol Bay (18 fished), one salmon hand troll permit for statewide waters (none fished), and one salmon power gurdy troll permit for statewide waters (one fished).

Other Finfish: There was one freshwater miscellaneous finfish set gillnet permit issued in Homer, but the permit was not fished.

Homer is also an important hub for commercial fish processing, with six registered processors and a total of 2,660 tons of processed fish from federally managed fisheries in 2000. For that year, vessels made deliveries to processors in Homer for the following fisheries: sablefish (41 vessels), halibut (142 vessels), other groundfish (109 vessels), and salmon (4 vessels).

In 2002, the Kenai Peninsula Borough received $810 in federal funds in compensation for fisheries losses due to Steller sea lion habitat protection under the Endangered Species Act. In 2003, Homer received $80,914 in federal salmon disaster funds to compensate the community for falling salmon prices. The Kenai Peninsula Borough as a whole received $623,295 in salmon compensation funds.

Sport Fishing

The importance of sport fishing to the economy of Homer cannot be overstated. Fishermen from Alaska, the lower 48 U.S. states, Canada and elsewhere come to Homer to fish in Cook Inlet, Kachemak Bay, and nearby rivers. The sport fishing industry primarily revolves around halibut, but silver, sockeye and pink salmon are also important. Nearby rivers offer fishing for steelhead and Dolly Varden, as well.

In 2000, sport fishing license sales in Homer totaled 20,550, including 14,664 sold to non-residents. There were 84 registered saltwater sport fishing guides and 21 freshwater sport fishing guides in Homer in 2002.

Subsistence Fishing

Many residents in Homer depend to some degree upon subsistence resources for their livelihoods. In recent years, however, the Kenai Peninsula has been classified as "non-rural" under subsistence designation, so residents have not been permitted to harvest subsistence resources from federally managed lands and waters. Significant harvesting of subsistence resource still occurs on state-managed lands and waters.

In terms of historical reliance on subsistence, the ADF&G's Division of Subsistence reported in 1982 that 86.7% of households in Homer used salmon for subsistence (all five Pacific species), and 92.5% used non-salmon fish (including halibut, trout, herring, and other species). A significant portion of households (87.9%) also used marine invertebrates (including clams, crabs, mussels, and shrimp) for subsistence.

The average annual per capita harvest of subsistence foods for Homer residents in 1982 was 93.8 pounds, and was comprised of the following resources: salmon (21.2%), non-salmon fish (31.9%), land mammals (25.4%), marine invertebrates (17.9%), birds and eggs (2.1%), and vegetation (1.9%). The most important variety of non-salmon fish for Homer residents is halibut, primarily from Cook Inlet. Salmon is landed from Cook Inlet, Kachemak Bay, and nearby rivers.