

Nelson Lagoon

People and Place

Location

Nelson Lagoon is an unincorporated city in the Aleutians East Borough. It is located 580 miles southwest of Anchorage, on the northern coast of the Alaska Peninsula. The area encompasses 135.3 square miles of land and 61.4 square miles of water.

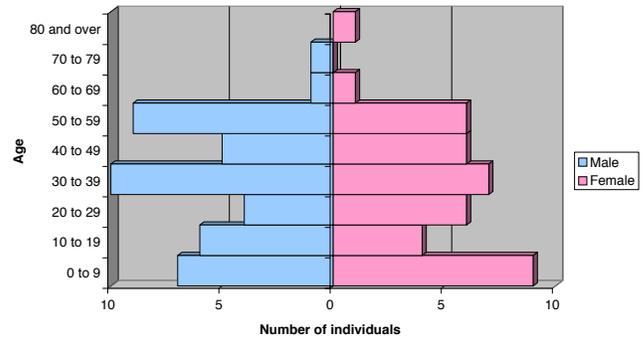
Demographic Profile

Nelson Lagoon has 83 permanent residents in 31 households, with an average household size of 2.68 people, and its population is predominantly comprised of Alaska Natives. The gender composition of the community is only somewhat skewed, at 51.8% male and 48.2% female. The racial makeup of the community is as follows: White (13.3%), Alaska Native or American Indian (78.3%), Asian (2.4%), and residents of two or more races (6.0%). A total of 81.9% of the population recognized themselves as all or part Alaska Native or American Indian. The median age of residents was 33.3 years, whereas the national age median was 35.3 years. All of Nelson Lagoon’s permanent residents live in households rather than group quarters, but the population often increases four-fold during the summer months, when temporary residents come for the salmon fishing season.

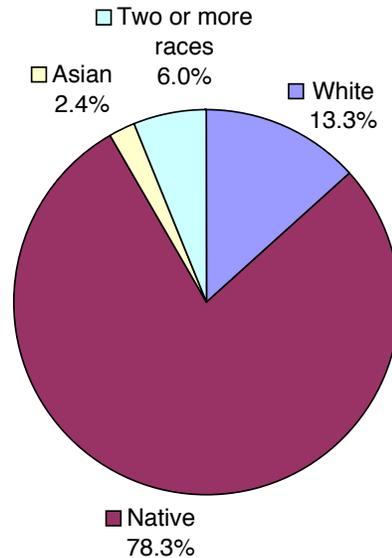
History

The presence of ancient artifacts suggests that Aleut people hunted and fished in this area in the distant past. Permanent human settlement, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon in Nelson Lagoon. The lagoon itself was named in 1882 for Edward William Nelson of the U.S. Signal Corps, who explored the Yukon Delta region in the late 19th century. Coal mining in the nearby Herendeen Bay area began in the late 1800s, but died out shortly thereafter as dependence on fuel oils grew. A salmon saltery was in operation on the site from 1906 to 1917, attracting Scandinavian fishermen, but the site was not occupied year-round until 1965, when a school was built (Rennick 1994: 40-42). Today, Peter Pan Seafoods operates a cold storage facility across Herendeen Bay at Port Moller, and most of Nelson Lagoon’s residents are involved in the commercial salmon fishery.

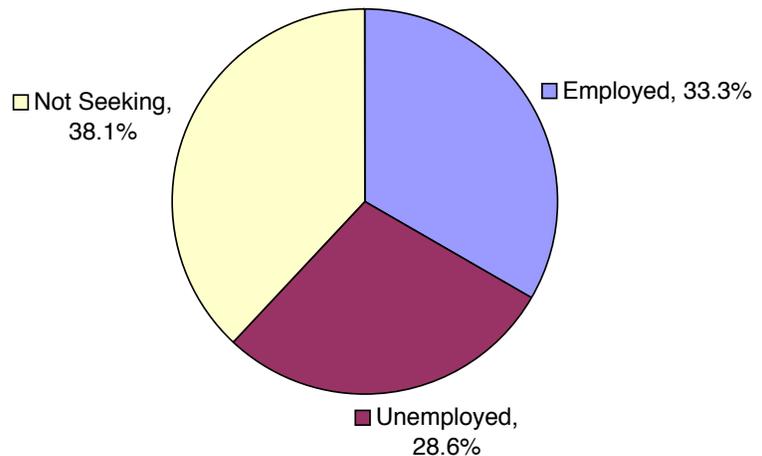
2000 Population Structure Nelson Lagoon
Data source: US Census



2000 Racial Structure Nelson Lagoon
Data source: US Census



2000 Employment Structure Nelson Lagoon
Data source: US Census



Infrastructure

Current Economy

The economy of Nelson Lagoon is largely dependent on the salmon fishery. Many local residents hold commercial fishing permits, and most of the salmon catch is processed at the nearby town of Port Moller. The median annual per capita income in Nelson lagoon is \$27,596, and the median household income is \$43,750. Approximately 6.4% of community residents live below the poverty level.

The 2000 U.S. Census reports that 28.6% of residents were unemployed and 38.1% were not in the labor force (i.e. not working and not seeking work) Given Nelson Lagoon's high degree of dependence on the commercial fishery, and the seasonal nature of this type of employment, a more likely interpretation is that employment opportunities vary according to season. Approximately 10.8% of residents are employed by the government at the city, borough, state, and federal levels. Some subsistence hunting and fishing supplements the main economy. There is also a small commercial sector in Nelson Lagoon, including traveler accommodations, child care, and a grocery store.

Governance

Nelson Lagoon is an unincorporated village governed by a village council, which is recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The village council is a member of the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association, a community development quota (CDQ) group responsible for allocating community development quota proceeds and investing in infrastructural development. The village is also a member of the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, a non-profit organization, and the Aleut Corporation, a regional Native corporation.

There is no property tax and no sales tax in Nelson Lagoon. A 2% raw fish tax is administered by the borough. The nearest NMFS office and Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) office are in Kodiak. The nearest Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) office is located in Port Moller.

Facilities

The local water utility is operated by the village council, and consists of piped water from a 600,000 gallon storage tank. Nelson Lagoon Electric Cooperative provides electricity produced by a diesel

generator. Individually owned septic tanks constitute the sewer system. The Nelson Lagoon Health Clinic, owned by the local village council, provides health care to the community. Police services (VPSO) are provided by the borough.

The Nelson Lagoon School, operated by the borough, has two teachers and 11 students from grades K-12. Access to Nelson Lagoon is by plane or boat. Transportation facilities include a gravel airstrip, a dock, and a boat ramp. Roundtrip airfare to Anchorage, via Sand Point, is approximately \$571 (Travelocity 2003).

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Commercial fishing, particularly in the salmon fishery, is a vital part of the economy in Nelson Lagoon. In 2000 there were 31 commercial permits held by 24 residents, and 18 vessel owners who resided in the community. There were 25 vessels home-ported and 23 registered crew members in the community.

Commercial permits in 2000 were issued for the following fisheries: 16 salmon set gillnet permits for the Alaska Peninsula (16 fished), 11 salmon drift gillnet permits for the Alaska Peninsula (11 fished), 3 herring roe gillnet permits for the Alaska Peninsula (3 fished), and one Korean Hair Crab pot gear permit for vessels under 60 feet statewide (none fished).

In 2000 there were no processing plants in Nelson Lagoon and therefore no registered landings. Most landings are taken to nearby Port Moller, where there is a processing plant and cold storage facility. In 2002 the Aleutians East Borough was granted \$140,063 in federal funds to compensate for fisheries losses due to the protection of Steller sea lion habitat under the Endangered Species Act. In addition, the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Community Development Association, a regional community development quota group (CDQ), received \$57,163 in Steller sea lion funds. In 2003 the Aleutians East Borough was granted \$1,101,638 in federal disaster funds to compensate for falling salmon prices. A portion of these sums will likely be used for programs that directly affect Nelson Lagoon.

Sport Fishing

There is limited sport fishing in Nelson Lagoon, with a total of eight licenses sold locally in 2000. Of

this total, six were sold to Alaska residents and two to non-residents.

Subsistence Fishing

Subsistence fishing, particularly for sockeye salmon, is an important part of the economy for Nelson Lagoon residents. The ADF&G's Division of Subsistence reports that, in 1987, 100% of households in Nelson Lagoon used subsistence resources. Approximately 92.3% of households used subsistence salmon, and 53.8% used non-salmon subsistence fish (including cod, flounder, and char). Approximately 7.7% of households used marine mammals for subsistence, and 100% of households used marine invertebrates.

The annual per capita harvest of subsistence foods for Nelson Lagoon in 1987 was 253.9 lbs, and was comprised of the following resources: salmon (33.8.0%), non-salmon fish (1.8%), land mammals (51.2%), marine mammals (0.5%), birds and bird eggs (3.0%), marine invertebrates (6.3%), and vegetation (1.8%).