

# Port Heiden

## People and Place

### Location

Port Heiden is located on the northern shore of the Alaska Peninsula, near the mouth of the Meshik River. It lies 424 miles southwest of Anchorage. It is situated close to the Aniakchak National Preserve and Monument, in the Kvichak Recording District. The area encompasses 50.7 square miles of land and 0.7 square miles of water.

### Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Port Heiden had 119 inhabitants in 41 households. All residents lived in housing rather than group quarters. The racial composition of the community included: 65.5% Alaska Natives or American Indians, 19.3% White, 2.5% other, and 12.6% two or more races. A total of 78.2% of the population recognized themselves as all or part Alaska Native or American Indian. In addition, 2.5% of residents were of Hispanic. The gender ratio of the community was slightly unbalanced, at 51.3% male and 48.7% female. Although the median age of the village was not as young as some surrounding villages, its median age of 33 years was still under the U.S. national median of 35.3 years. Approximately 41.7% of the population was under 19 years of age, and only 15.1% was over 55 years.

In terms of educational attainment, only 55.4% of residents aged 25 or older held a high school degree or higher level of education. Approximately 12.5% of residents had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 44.7% did not complete high school.

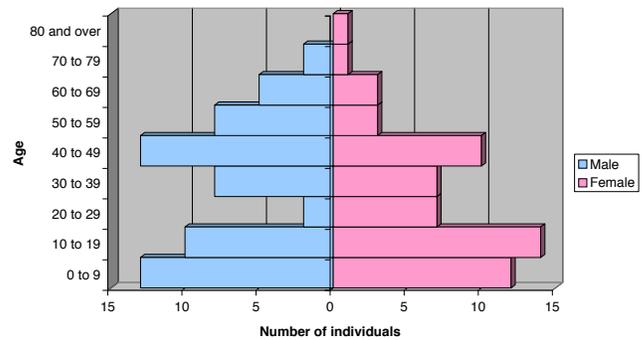
### History

This area is the only natural protected harbor between Port Moller and Ugashik Bay. The current site of Port Heiden is the result of the consolidation of the old village of Meshik and its more recent neighboring community, Port Heiden. Meshik was populated since the 1880s and benefited from the salmon boom in Bristol Bay, early in the 20th century.

The influenza epidemic of 1918-19 hit hard in the area. Meshik never fully recovered, although people from neighboring smaller communities that had been affected by the epidemic regrouped there. Port Heiden Packing Company operated a saltery in the community until the 1930s. The canneries, important employers of

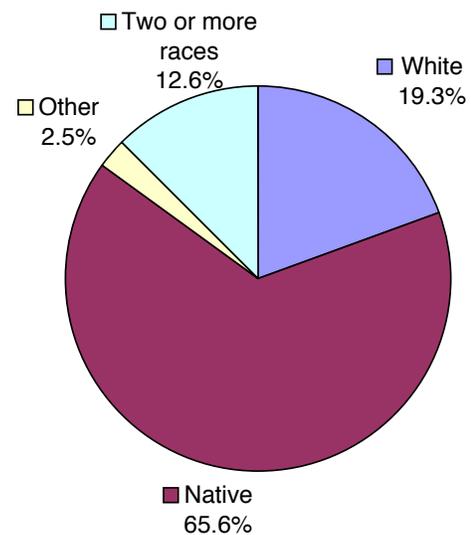
**2000 Population Structure  
Port Heiden**

Data source: US Census



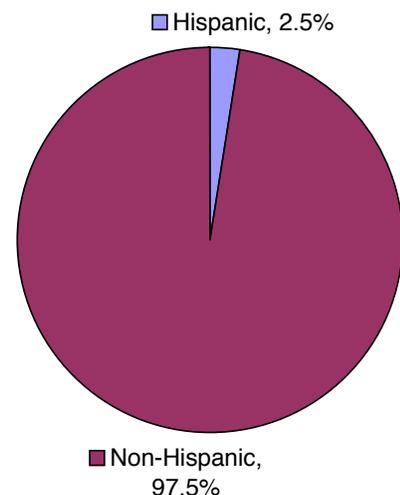
**2000 Racial Structure  
Port Heiden**

Data source: US Census



**2000 Hispanic Ethnicity  
Port Heiden**

Data source: US Census



the area, were located in Ugashik.

WWII drastically changed the social landscape of the area: Fort Morrow was built nearby, and 5,000 personnel were stationed at the base. The military, however, vanished after the war.

A school was established in the early 1950s, which attracted people from surrounding villages. Port Heiden incorporated as a city in 1972. The community recently relocated inland because storm waves had eroded much of the old town site and threatened to destroy community buildings.

## Infrastructure

### Current Economy

The two main anchors of Port Heiden's economy are commercial fishing and government jobs. There is also a local company, Christensen and Sons, which buys and flies local fish out to urban markets. The 2000 U.S. Census reported that 57.9% of the total workforce was employed, 11.6% was unemployed, and 30.4% was not seeking employment.

The median per capita income of Port Heiden in 2000 was \$20,532 and the median household income was \$31,875. Approximately 5.6% of the local population lived below the poverty line. Subsistence practices, including fishing and hunting, are present in the area and play a significant role on the local economy.

### Governance

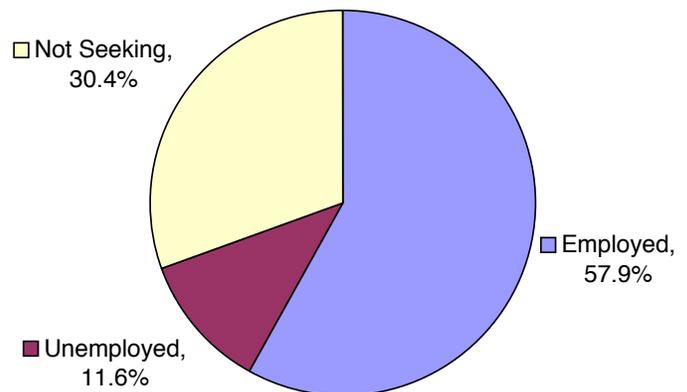
Port Heiden is a second-class city and was incorporated in 1972. It is located in the Lake and Peninsula Borough. Its form of government is "Strong Mayor" with a seven-member council. The borough administers a 6% tax on accommodations.

The Bristol Bay Native Corporation is the regional corporation in this area. The Alaska Peninsula Corporation, responsible for the management of 70,000 acres of land, is the local corporation. This community is part of the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation (CDQ) and receives community development quotas from this organization. The city also has the Port Heiden Village Council, recognized by the BIA as a traditional council.

Although open only seasonally, the closest Alaska Department of Fish and Game offices are located in Chignik and Port Moller. Sand Point, King Salmon,

**2000 Employment Structure  
Port Heiden**

Data source: US Census



Dillingham or Kodiak are the closest permanent offices. The closest BCIS offices are in Kodiak, Unalaska or Anchorage. NMFS has its closest quarters in Kodiak, Unalaska or Homer.

### Facilities

The community is accessible by air and sea. It has a state-owned airport that acts as a transfer point for flights going west on the Pacific side of the Peninsula. This airport is a part of the legacy of a bygone military presence, as are some 60 miles of local roads. The price of a roundtrip ticket by plane from the community to Anchorage, connecting in Pilot Point and King Salmon, was \$597 plus the cost of a charter flight to Pilot Point.

There is a shallow natural boat harbor with no docks: a boat haul-out, beach off-loading area, and marine storage facilities. As in many other communities in the area, residents receive cargo from Seattle delivered twice a year. The barge is chartered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Accommodations are provided by several lodges. The local school, Meshik School, has 30 students and four teachers. Port Heiden also has a Health Clinic and a rescue squad. The village does not have centralized power; 89.2% of the houses use fuel or kerosene. There are no central water or sewage systems; all homes have individual wells and septic tanks.

## Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

### Commercial Fishing

According to 2000 official records, Port Heiden had 17 commercial permit holders with 29 all-fisheries combined permits. In addition, 22 individuals were registered crewmen and there were 16 owners of salmon vessels in the community, with no vessel owners working in federal fisheries. The Port Heiden fleet was involved in three important Alaskan fisheries: halibut, herring, and salmon.

The following is a breakdown of commercial permits issued to Port Heiden residents in 2000.

*Halibut:* Four commercial permits issued to longline vessels over 60 feet in length, with no permits fished.

*Salmon:* The salmon fleet accounted for most of Port Heiden's commercial fishing activities. It accounted for 18 permits, 15 of which were fished: 15 drift gillnet permits (13 fished), and three set gillnet permits (one fished). All were restricted to Bristol Bay.

*Herring:* Seven permits were issued, including one herring roe purse seine permit for Bristol Bay (one fished), and one purse seine permit (none fished), one herring roe gillnet permit for the Alaska Peninsula (none fished), and four herring roe gillnet permits for Bristol Bay (none fished).

Although Port Heiden had a fleet working in its waters, there was no real landing of fish due to the absence of a processing plant. Vessels from this community deliver somewhere else.

Port Heiden received a direct allocation of \$1,106.23 in federal salmon disaster funds, and the Lake and Peninsula Borough received \$442,000. This allocation was implemented in 2003 to compensate for losses due to plummeting prices in the international market.

The Lake and Peninsula Borough and the BBEDC (CDQ) also received \$29,832, and \$75,026 respectively to reduce the impact of Steller sea lion protective regulations that came up after the inclusion of this species into the endangered species list. This allocation, under ESA regulations, was implemented in 2002.

The funds not directly allocated to the city were added to the general budget of the borough or the CDQ and helped to compensate the decline on fish tax income and to relieve the budgetary tensions of the institutions of the area.

### Sport Fishing

In 2000 Port Heiden issued eight sport fishing permits, all of which were bought by Alaskan residents. However, the area is visited by numerous outsiders that get their permits elsewhere. In 2002, the village had only one business license related to sport fishing as a tourist activity.

### Subsistence Fishing

In the survey conducted in 1987 by the ADF&G, Port Heiden demonstrated the significance of subsistence practices for traditional Alaskan communities. All households in that year participated in the use of harvested resources. In terms of the main marine resources, 91.1% of households used subsistence salmon, 91.9% used other types of fish (herring, smelt, cod, flounder, halibut, char, trout, and white fish), 32.4% used marine mammals, and 86.5% used marine invertebrates. The average per capita harvest of subsistence resources was 407.6 lbs. This statistic emphasizes the importance of subsistence for these communities, including fishing, hunting, and gathering.

The composition of the subsistence harvest in 1987 was as follows: salmon (20.88%), other fish (2.87%), land mammals (61.56%), marine mammals (3.86%), birds and eggs (19.2%), marine invertebrates (4.34%) and vegetation (3.4%).

In 1999 Port Heiden had three Alaska salmon subsistence permits: the catch was mainly sockeye. In addition, the inhabitants of this community (rural residents or members of an Alaska Native tribe) are eligible to harvest subsistence halibut by holding Subsistence Halibut Registration Certificates (SHARCs). 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.