

WELLFLEET, MA¹

Community Profile²

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Regional orientation

Wellfleet (41.94° N, 70.03° W) is situated on Cape Cod, a long sand peninsula on the east coast of the USA. Wellfleet is located in Barnstable County in the state of Massachusetts. The town is located 100 miles from Boston and 280 miles from New York City. Located about 75 miles out into the Atlantic Ocean, 61% of the land area of Wellfleet is in the Cape Cod National Seashore Park (Town of Wellfleet 2007).



Map 1. Location of Wellfleet, MA (US Census Bureau 2000)

Historical/Background

Wellfleet is a former whaling and fishing village, most famous for its local oysters. The town was incorporated in 1763 and was named after the ‘Wallfleet’ oyster beds of England (CapeCod.com nd). Billingsgate was an early name given to Wellfleet, and at Billingsgate point, the first lighthouse was erected. Captain Standish and the men from the Mayflower landed at the Point on their way to the mainland (Kew).

Whaling was the only business in the town before the Revolution. In fact, the most successful Wellfleet whalers became known as the “seed corn gang of whalers” because it was

¹ These community profiles have been created to serve as port descriptions in Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for fisheries management actions. They also provide baseline information from which to begin research for Social Impact Assessments (SIAs). Further, they provide information relevant to general community impacts for National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and information on minorities and low income populations for Executive Order (E.O.) 12898 on Environmental Justice.

² For purposes of citation please use the following template: “Community Profile of *Town, ST*. Prepared under the auspices of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Fisheries Science Center. For further information contact Lisa.L.Colburn@noaa.gov.”

from them that whaling techniques were spread to other coastal towns and to Nantucket (Town of Wellfleet 2005).

In 1770 a plague wiped out the prosperous Wellfleet oyster beds. During the Revolution, Wellfleet's harbor was blockaded and its whaling industry also died. After the war, commercial fishing became prominent and Wellfleet expanded. Estimates show that after the Civil War, half the fish eaten in the U.S. were caught by Cape Cod fishermen from Provincetown and Wellfleet. Primary harvests were cod and mackerel caught on large schooners. Although people continued to fish, the arrival and business pursuits of The United Fruit Company in the late 1800's marked a new and still current trend for the town; tourism (Capecod.com 2007).

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data (US Census Bureau 2000a), Wellfleet had a total population of 2,749, up 16.5% from the reported population of 2,359 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this 2000 total, 47.1% were males and 52.9% were females. The median age was 47.0 years and 80.0% of the population was 21 years or older while 25.5% was 62 or older.

The age structure of Wellfleet (see Figure 1) shows the largest number of adults between 40-59 years old. Although the number of people of retirement age (over 55 years old) is significant, the largest age bracket is between 40-49, adults that are most likely still working. The proportion of females is greater than males in all age categories except 0-9 and 10-19. There is a dip in the population between the ages of 20-29 which may indicate college-age youths leaving to pursue school or to work elsewhere.

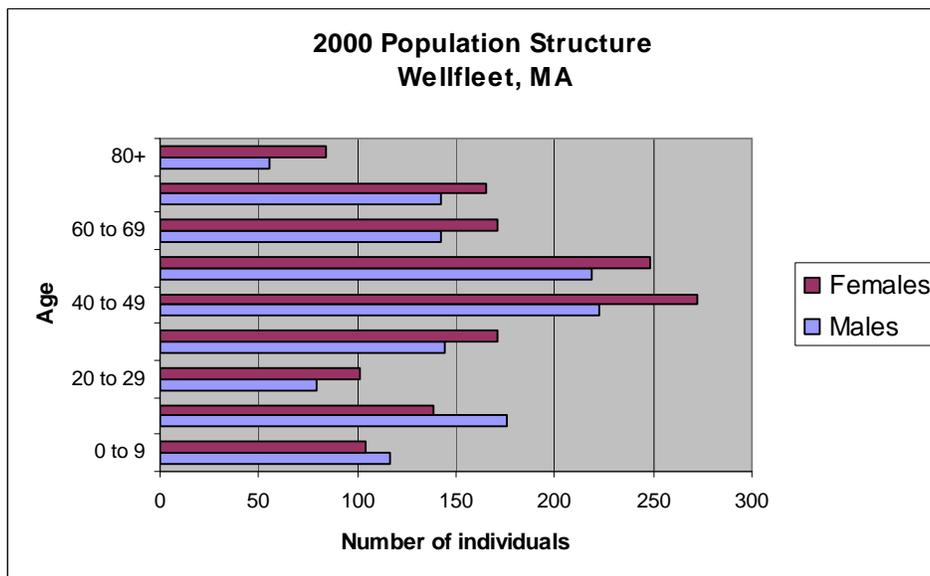


Figure 1. Wellfleet's population structure by sex in 2000

The majority of the population was white (97.7%), with 0.9% of residents black or African American, 0.4% Asian, 0.3% Native American, and 0.04% Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (see Figure 2). Only 0.7% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (see Figure

³ While mid-term estimates are available for some larger communities, data from the 2000 Census are the only data universally available for the communities being profiled in the Northeast. Thus for cross-comparability we have used 2000 data even though these data may have changed significantly since 2000 for at least some communities.

3). Residents linked their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including: English (29.6%), Irish (25.6%), German (12.1%), Portuguese (10.3%), and Italian (9.2%). With regard to region of birth, 55.3% were born in Massachusetts, 41.1% were born in a different state and 3.5% were born outside of the U.S. (including 1.2% who were not United States citizens).

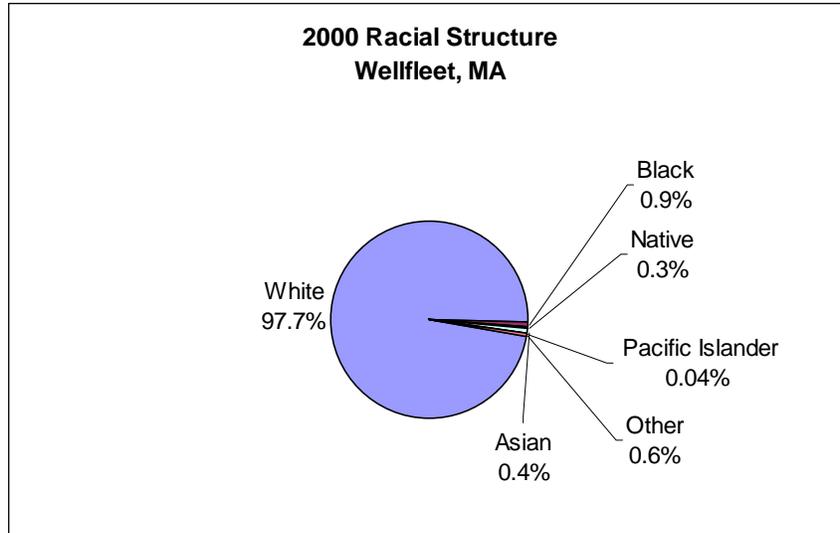


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

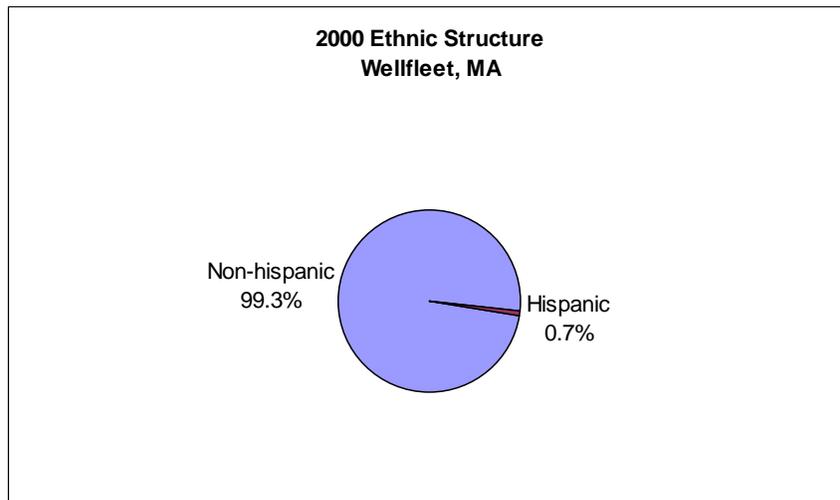


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

For 94.9% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 5.1% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, and including 0.5% of the population who spoke English less than 'very well' according to the 2000 Census.

Of the population 25 years and over, 92.7% were high school graduates or higher and 40.3% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 1.8% did not reach ninth grade, 5.5% attended some high school but did not graduate, 25.0% completed high school, 19.0% had some college with no degree, 8.5% received an associate's degree, 21.3% earned a bachelor's degree, and 19.0% received either a graduate or professional degree.

Although religion percentages are not available through the US Census, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) in 2000, the religion with the highest number of congregations and adherents in Barnstable County was Catholic with 29 congregations and 63,729 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were: Episcopal Church (11 with 7,093 adherents), United Church of Christ (17 with 6,141) and United Methodist Church (15 with 4,241 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was down 20.7% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

Issues/Processes

There are thirteen kettle ponds in Wellfleet and these fragile areas are being affected by population growth. Some issues affecting the ponds include: excess nutrient addition; increased amounts of sediment from shoreline erosion; possible public health hazards from bacterial contamination; possible chemical pollution; and potential acid rain impacts (Town of Wellfleet 2007a).

The Town is trying to fix the Wellfleet Town Pier, and as of January 2007, sealed bids were being accepted to rehabilitate the structure (Town of Wellfleet 2007).

As with most Cape towns, the price of housing is increasing in Wellfleet and the area is experiencing development pressures. In 1997, twenty-three percent of the land area of Wellfleet had been developed, but no current data is available through secondary sources for developed area in 2007 (Woods Hole Research Center 2005). Wellfleet, also like many Cape towns, is heavily tourist-oriented and faces many of the growth and affordable housing cost associated with tourist communities. According to the Town of Wellfleet Open Space Committee, the town was rapidly approaching its carrying capacity in 2005. The growth rate has been steady at about one percent per year (Town of Wellfleet 2005).

In the summer of 2005, New England's worst red tide outbreak in decades devastated the shellfishing industry and many local shellfish beds were closed to fishing. Red tides are caused by algal blooms of plankton that are not harmful to the shellfish that consume them, but can have deadly effects on humans who consume contaminated shellfish. Although the 'blooms' of these organisms is common further north in the region, it is uncommon to find such a large affect on Cape Cod, further pronouncing the effects on Wellfleet's shellfishing industry (Mahoney and Ranalli 2005).

Cultural attributes

Wellfleet is in the Cape Cod National Seashore Park, which offers various hiking trails. The Atlantic White Cedar Swamp Trail, which starts at the Marconi Beach parking area, is a 1 ¼ mile walk demonstrating the plant life and natural processes of erosion and stability characteristic of the area. The National Seashore also takes in part of the west side of Wellfleet to include Great Island, the barrier beach that protects Wellfleet Harbor from Cape Cod Bay.

The [Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater](#) (WHAT) has been an ongoing summer event series for over a decade and is located next to the pier.

[The Cape Cod Rail Trail](#) is used for hiking and biking and runs from Harwich through Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham and into Wellfleet, a distance of around 20 miles.

One of the main events held annually is the [Wellfleet OysterFest](#), a community festival held each year the weekend after Columbus Day. The two-day celebration features food, educational activities and events and is sponsored by the Shellfish Promotion and Tasting (SPAT) organization.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

In 2005, there were 162 private-sector employers in Wellfleet (State of Massachusetts 2005). Though not providing the highest wages, the largest employment sector in Wellfleet was in accommodation and food services followed by retail trade, owing to the town's large number of bed and breakfasts, restaurants and retail shops, all of which cater to tourists, primarily during the summer months. The shellfishing industry was also an important and central industry in the town with 2005 estimates showing income of \$2.75 million annually from shellfishing (Town of Wellfleet 2005).

According to the U.S. Census 2000⁴, 62.4% (1,452 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force, of which 4.7% were unemployed, none were in the Armed Forces, and 57.7% were employed.



Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

According to Census 2000 data, jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 51 positions or 3.8% of all jobs. Self employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 312 positions or 23.2% of jobs. Construction (18.7%), educational, health and social services (15.6%), arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (13.0%), and professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (10.7%) were the primary industries.

Median household income in Wellfleet was \$43,558 (up 78.9% from \$24,348 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and per capita income was \$25,712. For full-time year round workers, males made approximately 5.9% more per year than females.

The average family in Wellfleet consisted of 2.75 persons. With respect to poverty, 5.7% of families (down from 8.7% in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 7.5% of individuals earn below the official U.S. Census poverty threshold. This threshold is \$8,794 for individuals and

⁴ Again, Census data from 2000 are used because they are universally available and offer cross-comparability among communities. Some statistics, particularly median home price, are likely to have changed significantly since 2000.

ranges from \$11,239-35,060 for families, depending on number of persons (2-9) (US Census Bureau 2000b). In 2000, 27.3% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Wellfleet had a total of 3,998 housing units of which 32.5% were occupied and 88.3% were detached one unit homes. Almost 20% (16.6%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes, boats, RVs and vans accounted for 5.4% of housing units; 3.9% of detached units had between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$242,700. Of vacant housing units, 64.2% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units, 23.4% were renter occupied.

Government

Wellfleet is managed by a Board of Selectmen consisting of five elected representatives that hold Open Town Meetings. In addition to the Selectmen, the town has a Clerk/Treasurer, Collector, and various Committees and Commissioners dealing with specific town affairs such as housing and schools (Town of Wellfleet 2007b).

The Town has a Community Preservation Committee which aims to preserve community character and history. The Wellfleet Environmental Protection By-law seeks to protect the natural resources by controlling activities in the town limits, among them fisheries and shellfishing (Town of Wellfleet 2007b). Wellfleet is included in the 10th Massachusetts Congressional District; the Cape, Plymouth and Island States Senatorial District; and the Cape and Islands States Representative District (Town of Wellfleet 2007).

Fishery Involvement in Government

Wellfleet has a Harbormaster/Wharfinger that performs duties related to the marina and harbor as directed by the Board of Selectman (Town of Wellfleet 2007b). [The Wellfleet Shellfish Department](#) and Shellfish Constable manage permits and enforcement of shellfishing activities in the town. Shellfish licenses can be obtained through the Town Hall and the activity is permitted everyday to license holders, with a limit of 10 quarts a week per permit. Updates on closed areas are maintained on the Department's website.

Institutional

Fishing associations

[The Cape Cod Charter Association](#) provides people interested in sport fishing and coastal recreation with quality outdoor experiences. The association helps recreational enthusiasts find a range of companies, from charter fishing operators, to seal/ whale watching and other tours. Although the association is based out of Chathamport, they provide services throughout Wellfleet.

In the nearby town of Chatham, [the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association](#) is a local, non-profit group working to protect small-scale, sustainable fisheries on the Cape.

The [Massachusetts Fisherman's Partnership](#) focuses on issues for fishermen in different ports in Massachusetts. The Partnership responded to the need of health care for fishermen and their families by developing the Fishing Partnership Health Insurance Plan with federal and state aid. This plan has been in place since 1997 and reduces the amount of money that fishermen's families have to pay to be covered by health insurance (Hall-Arber et al. 2001).

Fishing assistance centers

The nearest fishery assistance center is the [Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association](#) in Chatham (about 9 miles away). The organization has a resource center and offers various services to fishermen and the fishing community, including scholarships and safety training.

Other fishing related organizations

The [Herring River Restoration Project](#) in Wellfleet seeks to restore salt marsh habitat that are critical nursery areas for commercial fish. The Project aims to modify and restructure the Chequessett Neck Road Dike. A new dike with wider openings, would allow a greater range of tides to reach upstream, while also allowing sufficient drainage to Wellfleet Harbor.

[Massachusetts Audubon's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary](#) provides a Nature Center, public environmental education programs, and acquires land in the area for conservation purposes.

The Shellfish Promotion and Tasting (SPAT) is a non-profit organization in Wellfleet, “devoted to fostering greater understanding of the town’s shellfishing industry” through education, seminars, scholarships, and through the annual [Wellfleet OysterFest](#).

Physical

Wellfleet is located in Southeastern Massachusetts, on the eastern side of Cape Cod. The Town of Truro is to the north, the Town of Eastham is to the south, and Cape Cod Bay is to the west. The nearest major town is Hyannis (33 miles south), with Boston 101 miles away, and Providence, RI about 113 miles away. New York City is 280 miles from Wellfleet (State of Massachusetts 2007). There are no regular bus services offered in Wellfleet, however Peter Pan and Bonanza bus services operate from other locations on Cape Cod with regular, year-round schedules to Boston and Providence. [The Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority](#) operates bus service from Hyannis to Orleans and also provides a Capewide b-bus Service. The b-bus provides door-to-door rides by appointment on a flexible, pre-paid account schedule. The service operates throughout the year excluding certain Holidays. The principal highway is U.S. Route 6, the Mid Cape Highway. The Provincetown Municipal Airport is about 15 miles away, while Logan Airport is the nearest International airport located about 100 miles away in Boston.

At the Town Pier, there are at least two marine service stores; [Small Boat Service](#) and [Wellfleet Marine](#). Town Pier is also the most accessible public boat launch. There are at least two boat rental businesses in Wellfleet, [Erin-H](#) and [Jack's Boat Rentals](#). The one-man operated [Old Wharf Dory Company](#) produces custom made wooden boats in Wellfleet. Black Duck Sports Shop and Gone Fishin both in South Wellfleet offer bait and tackle for recreational anglers.

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES⁵

Commercial

There are several seafood markets in Wellfleet, most boasting locally caught products. In terms of the Wellfleet Harbor, the tide range is ten feet, making it a tidal harbor with uses and activities regulated by the tides. The harbor has productive shellfish beds which provide a valuable commercial enterprise (Town of Wellfleet 2004).

Wellfleet oysters are sold locally, regionally, and nationally for prices that range from 40 to 75 cents per oyster, with restaurants selling them for as much as two dollars per oyster. In 2001, over 1,400 people purchased shellfish permits and of these, 23 percent purchased commercial permits. Commercial boats accounted for the biggest majority of the quahog catch (95%), a significant portion of the oyster catch (29%), and the entire bay scallop catch. Aquaculture has played a big role in Wellfleet's shellfish output. The aquaculture harvest was almost double the total commercial public fishery catch in 2001, exceeding it by over 5,000 bushels. It is important to note that 2001 was considered a poor harvest year (according to the Town) relative to other recent years, however, shellfishing remains a vital component of Wellfleet's history and current business (Town of Wellfleet 2002).

The largest dollar value species in Wellfleet from 1997-2006 is represented as 'Other' (see Table 1), which could indicate oysters or other shellfish. The landings in this species grouping were valued at over \$3.6 million in 2006, considerably higher than the ten-year averaged value. The vast majority of landings in 2006 fell into this "other" species group. Landings in Wellfleet were low in many years, falling to \$73,456 in 1999, but then jumped to \$3.2 million in 2005 and \$4.1 million in 2006.

The number of vessels home ported in Wellfleet remained relatively consistent from 1997 to 2006, with a dip in 2000 which again increased in the following years, and then fell again to 11 in 2006 (see Table 2). The level of fishing for these home ported vessels did not follow the pattern in landings, with \$350,000 in home ported fishing in 2006, indicating that the majority of landings in Wellfleet in 2005 and 2006 were from vessels kept elsewhere.

⁵ In reviewing the commercial landings data several factors need to be kept in mind. 1) While both federal and state landings are included, some states provide more detailed data to NMFS than others. For example, shellfish may not be included or data may be reported only by county and not by port. 2) Some communities did not have individual port codes until more recently. Before individual port codes were assigned, landings from those ports were coded at the county level or as an aggregate of two geographically close small ports. Where landings were coded at the county level they cannot be sorted to individual ports for those earlier years, e.g., prior to 2000. 3) Where aggregated codes were used, those aggregate codes may still exist and be in use alongside the new individual codes. Here the landings which are still assigned to the aggregate port code cannot be sorted into the individual ports, so port level data are only those which used the individual port code. 4) Even when individual port codes exist, especially for small ports, landings may be coded at the county level. Here again it is impossible to disaggregate these to a port level, making the port level landings incomplete. 5) In all these cases, the per port data in this profile may under report the total level of landings to the port, though all landings are accounted for in the overall NMFS database.

Landings by Species

Table 1. Dollar Value of Federally Managed Groups of landing in Wellfleet

	Average from 1997-2006	2006 only
Other ⁶	635,937	3,654,676
Surf Clams, Ocean Quahog	137,209	206,052
Lobster	110,307	258,794
Scallop	76,114	56,919
Bluefish	1,527	4,498
Largemouth Groundfish ⁷	1,417	32
Monkfish	471	267
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	248	17

Vessels by Year⁸

Table 2. All columns represent vessel permits or landings value combined between 1997-2006

Year	# Vessels (home ported)	# Vessels (owner's city)	Level of fishing home port (\$)	Level of fishing landed port (\$)
1997	18	16	268,848	297,738
1998	14	13	118,581	165,213
1999	14	13	132,598	73,456
2000	9	9	550,518	236,672
2001	16	20	958,137	264,662
2002	16	19	194,274	305,268
2003	14	14	847,941	446,557
2004	18	17	341,219	402,814
2005	15	15	713,614	3,258,673
2006	11	12	351,208	4,181,255

(Note: # Vessels home ported = No. of permitted vessels with location as homeport

Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence⁹

Level of fishing home port (\$) = Landed value of fisheries associated with home ported vessels

Level of fishing landed port (\$) = Landed value of fisheries landed in location)

Recreational

The Chequessett Neck Road Dike is popular for fishing on the Wellfleet Harbor. The dike was built in 1908 to control mosquitoes but has since contributed to nearby salt marsh degradation (Town of Wellfleet 2007).

⁶ "Other" species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group

⁷ Largemouth Groundfish: cod, winter flounder, yellowtail flounder, American plaice, sand-dab flounder, haddock, white hake, redfish, and pollock

⁸ Numbers of vessels by owner's city and homeport are as reported by the permit holder on permit application forms. These may not correspond to the port where a vessel lands or even spends the majority of its time when docked.

⁹ The Owner-City from the permit files is technically the address at which the owner receives mail concerning their permitted vessels, which could reflect the actual location of residence, the mailing address as distinct from residence, owner business location, or the address at which a subsidiary receives mail about the permits.

There are several [sport fishing charter](#) businesses that operate out of Wellfleet Harbor on a seasonal (summer) basis. Common recreational species targeted include: bluefish, striped bass, Atlantic bluefin tuna, sharks, and other species of game fish. From spring to early summer, anglers can target mackerel, flounder, cod, and tautog. Many sport fishing operations also offer [marine life cruises](#), some of whom team up with the [Massachusetts Audubon Society](#).

Wellfleet's freshwater ponds are stocked with trout, native perch, pickerel and sunfish. Gull, Great and Long Ponds are the largest and most accessible freshwater fishing areas. Fishing licenses are not required for saltwater fishing and freshwater anglers age 15 and up can obtain licenses at Town Hall (Wellfleet Chamber of Commerce 2007).

Subsistence

Information on subsistence activity in Wellfleet is either unavailable through secondary data collection or the practice does not exist.

FUTURE

Growth pressures and the conversion of forest and open land for “urban” uses is an ongoing issue in Wellfleet. Wellfleet has changed from the small fishing village that it was in the middle of the seventeenth century to a largely summer resort and retirement community, with art galleries and shell fishing as its main additional forms of business. Although the establishment of the Cape Cod National Seashore in 1961 has had a positive effect on the town, it has also forced growth and development into one third of the town’s area.

Other trends in Wellfleet include the increasing conversion of seasonal homes to year round use, and the impact of potential development of privately owned recreational facilities including the drive-in theater and Wellfleet’s two campgrounds. Such changes could dramatically alter the open space and recreation makeup of the town (Town of Wellfleet 2005). Changes in the community structure and increasing housing costs can adversely affect fishermen and their families, especially in the face of uncertain and changing resource issues and management decisions.

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