

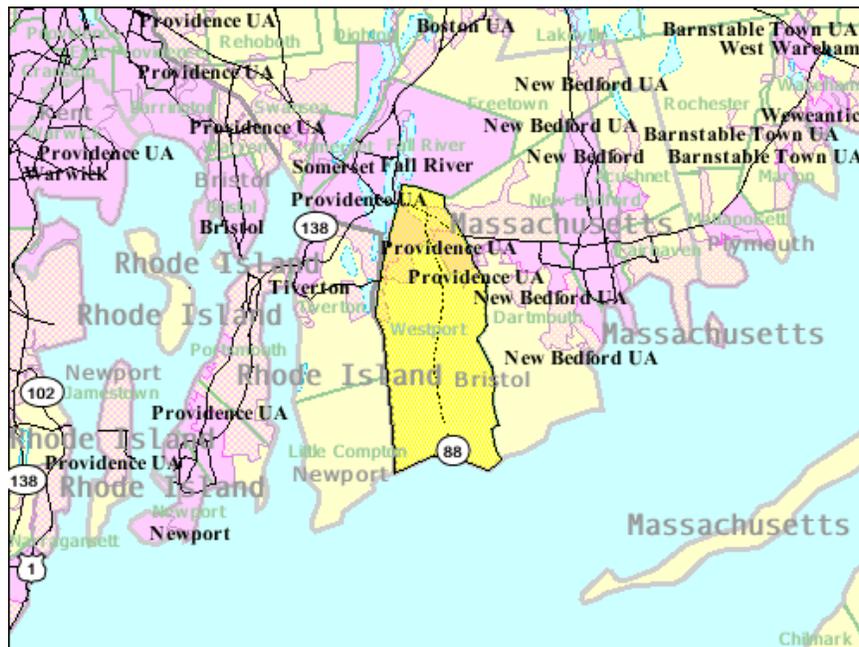
WESTPORT, MA¹

Community Profile²

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Regional orientation

The Town of Westport (41.58° N, 71.08° W) is located in Southeastern Massachusetts in Bristol County, along the Rhode Island border. It borders Fall River and is about 8 miles from New Bedford. The total area of this large town is 64.40 square miles, of which 50.06 square miles are land (State of Massachusetts 2005). The Westport River has two branches that flow through the town into Rhode Island Sound and Buzzard's Bay.



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

Historical/Background

Originally home to the Wampanoag Indian tribe, the first European in Westport was English Explorer Bartholomew Gosnold, who visited this area in 1602, when he settled on the island of Cuttyhunk, off the Westport coast. The land here was purchased at various times through the 1600s from the Wampanoags. Westport was originally part of the neighboring town of Dartmouth, but was incorporated as its own town in 1787 (Westport Historical Society 2005). The town was named because it formed the western-most boundary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony; the eastern boundary was Eastport, Maine (Southcoast Navigator 2005). Westport was a

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."

Quaker enclave in the late 1700s (Hall-Arber et al. 2001), and played an important role as part of the Underground Railroad during the Civil War (Southcoast Navigator 2005). In 1857, there were eighteen whaling vessels working out of Westport Point. Fishing was also an important industry for the town by the mid-1800s (Westport Historical Society 2005). The village of Westport Harbor is still known by its Narragansett Indian name, Acoaxet, which means “at the fishing promontory” (Harbor Inn 2005). Today, Westport is popular among visitors because of its miles of sandy beaches. Fishing, farming, and ship-building are all traditional industries in Westport that continue to be important to the town today (Bristol County 2005).

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data (US Census Bureau 2000a), Westport had a total population of 14,183, up 0.2% from the reported population of 13,852 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this 2000 total, 49.0% were males and 51.0% were females. The median age was 41.0 years and 75.4% of the population was 21 years or older while 17.5% was 62 or older.

The age structure for Westport (see Figure) shows the most populous age group for both men and women is the 40-49 year old grouping, followed closely by both the 30-39 and 50-59 age groups. The age structure shows a dip in population for both men and women in the 20-29 age bracket, indicating an out-migration of young people moving elsewhere for college and/or to seek jobs that is common in many fishing communities.

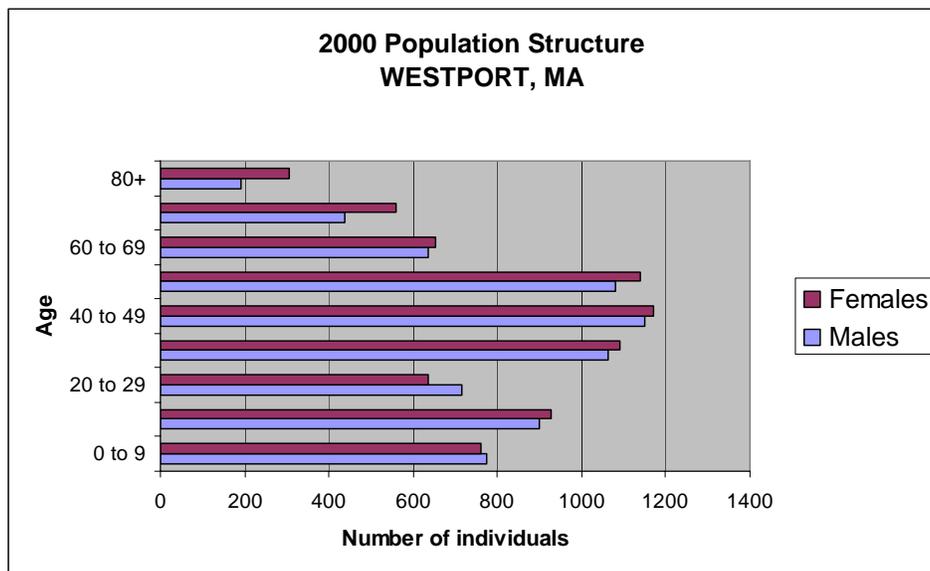


Figure 1 Westport's population structure by sex in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

The majority of the population was White (97.9%), with 0.4% of residents Black or African American, 0.6% Asian, 0.3% Native American, and 0.1% Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (see Figure 2). Only 0.7% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (see Figure 3). Residents link their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including: Portuguese (34.7%), English (17.1%), French (15.8%), Irish (12.7%), and French Canadian (9.4%). With

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.

regard to region of birth, 79.6% were born in Massachusetts, 12.0% were born in a different state and 8.1% were born outside of the U.S. (including 2.2% who were not United States citizens).

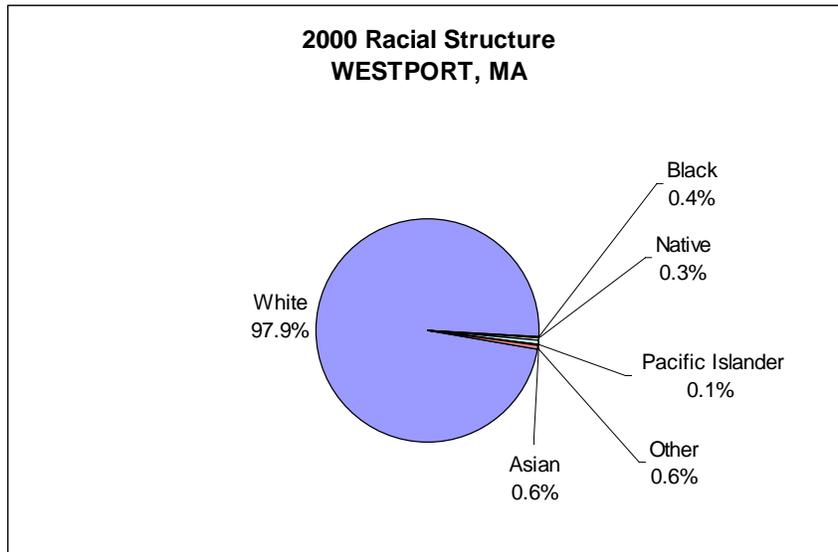


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

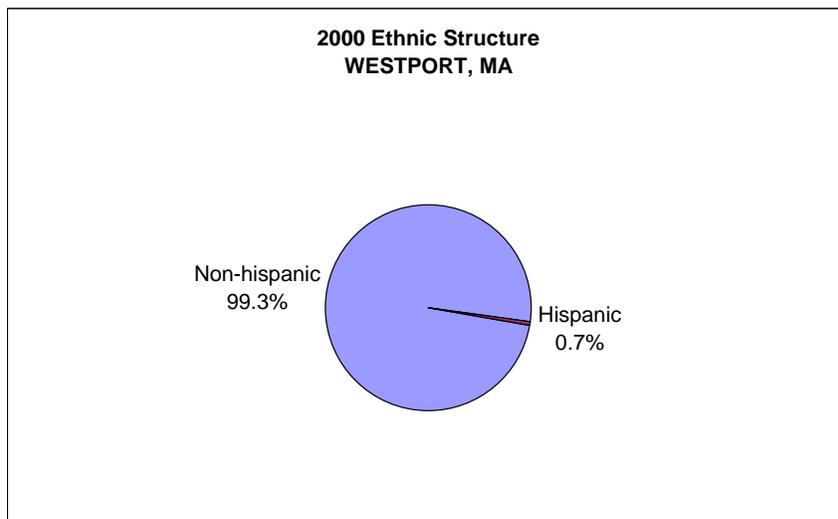


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

For 85.5% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 14.5% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, and including 3.8% of the population who spoke English less than 'very well' according to the 2000 Census.

Of the population 25 years and over, 78.5% were high school graduates or higher and 25.3% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 10.0% did not reach ninth grade, 11.5% attended some high school but did not graduate, 29.9% completed high school, 15.1% had some college with no degree, 8.3% received an associate's degree, 13.5% earned a bachelor's degree, and 11.8% received either a graduate or professional degree.

Although religion percentages are not available through the U.S. Census, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) in 2000, the religion with the highest number of

congregations and adherents in Bristol County was Catholic with 85 congregations and 268,434 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were Jewish (5 with 11,600 adherents), United Church of Christ (19 with 5,728 adherents) and Episcopal (18 with 5,100 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was up 9.4% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

Issues/Processes

“Of the nearly 3,000 acres of shellfish beds in the Westport River estuary, 650 acres are permanently closed due to pathogen contamination. Another 1,522 acres are conditionally or seasonally closed... Both branches of the river are listed on the Commonwealth’s 303d list of impaired water bodies for pathogen and nitrogen contamination. In the summer months upper reaches of the river are consistently closed for public swimming due to pathogen contamination. There have also been several beach closures over the past few years due to failures of bathing beach safety standards. Pathogen contamination is due to Nonpoint Source pollution from agricultural runoff, poorly maintained and failing septic systems, and waterfowl congregations” (Westport River Watershed Alliance 2005). Nitrogen contamination is due primarily to septic systems that do not remove nitrogen, fertilizers, stormwater runoff, and wildlife.

Maintaining the rural character of the town, including preserving the town’s farmland and protecting and enhancing the water quality of the [Westport River](#) and its estuary are listed as primary issues facing the town of Westport.

Cultural attributes

The [Westport Fishermen’s Association](#) recently erected a memorial to fishermen lost at sea throughout Westport’s history.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

The largest employer in Westport is the [LaFrance Hospitality Company](#), which owns two restaurants and a hotel in Westport, as well as a restaurant and two hotels in the surrounding area, a hotel in New Hampshire, and a catering company based in Westport. The second largest employer in Westport is [Lee’s Market](#). Farming is still a significant industry within Westport; it is the largest dairy farming community in Massachusetts, and also has one of the largest plant nurseries on the east coast (Town of Westport 2005). Westport residents who work outside of the town most commonly commute to Fall River for work. The largest employers in Fall River include St. Anne’s Hospital (1,079 employees), Labor Express (Temporary staffing – 1,000 employees), Bristol Community College (760 employees), Lightolier, Inc. (lighting fixtures – 650 employees), and Joan Fabrics (600 employees). Other significant employers in neighboring Dartmouth which are likely to employ Westport residents are Mitsubishi Lithographic (wholesale printing equipment - 3,500 employees) and the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth (1,200 employees) (SRPEDD 2002).

According to the U.S. Census 2000⁴, 65.0% (7,519 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (see Figure 4), of which 2.4% were unemployed, none were in the Armed Forces, and 62.6% were employed.

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.



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 96 positions or 1.3% of all jobs. Self employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 457 positions or 6.3% of jobs. Education, health, and social services (23.0%), manufacturing (16.1%), and retail trade (10.9%) were the primary industries.

Median household income in Westport was \$55,436 (up 49.4% from \$37,092 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and per capita income was \$25,281. For full-time year round workers, males made approximately 35.5% more per year than females.

The average family in Westport consisted of 3.01 persons. With respect to poverty, 3.7% of families (up from 2.6% in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 4.9% of individuals earned below the U.S. Census poverty threshold. This threshold is \$8,794 for individuals and ranges from \$11,239 through \$35,060 for families, depending on number of persons (2-9) (US Census Bureau 2000b). In 2000, 19.6% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Westport had a total of 6,143 housing units of which 87.7% were occupied and 84.6% were detached one unit homes. More than 20% (21.3%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes accounted for 0.2% of the total housing units; 87.5% of detached units had between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$163,400. Of vacant housing units, 9.7% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units 17.2% were renter occupied.

Government

Westport has a Town Meeting form of government with a Board of Selectmen. The town was incorporated in 1787.

Fishery involvement in government

The Town of Westport has a Shellfish Warden and Shellfish Department, as well as a harbormaster. The town aims to provide sustainable shellfish resources for the commercial and recreational use of town residents. To accomplish this goal, the town has a [shellfish aquaculture program](#) in place. The department transfers oysters and quahogs from polluted areas upstream and in the nearby Taunton River to cleaner areas of the Westport River to allow the shellfish to

clean themselves out and to later be harvested.⁵

Institutional

Fishing associations

[The Westport Fishermen's Association](#), established in 1983, is dedicated to preserving and protecting the Westport River Watershed through advocacy and education programs about pollution in the watershed and through the development of shellfish propagation. Their roughly 400 members include commercial fishermen and other members of the community concerned with the health of the river and its shellfish beds.⁶

Two fishing charter vessels in Westport are members of the [Rhode Island Saltwater Angler's Association](#), which supports conservation of marine resources and presents a unified voice to protect recreational fishing in Rhode Island.

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

[Shore Support](#) has been the primary fishing assistance center in nearby New Bedford since 2000 (Hall-Arber et al. 2001), though the New Bedford Fishermen and Families Assistance Centers are also available as is the Trawlers Survival Fund.

Other fishing-related organizations

[The Westport River Watershed Alliance](#) monitors and works to improve bacterial contamination and nitrogen loading within the watershed, to preserve this important habitat for a number of spawning fish and the numerous shellfish beds found within the watershed. The Alliance also provides extensive environmental education programs both in-school and community-wide. There are also several other fishing related organizations and associations that are vital to the area's fishing industry such as the Fisheries' Survival Fund in Fairhaven, the New Bedford Fishermen's Union, the New Bedford Seafood Coalition, the New Bedford Seafood Council and the Offshore Mariner's Association.

Physical

The closest airport is the New Bedford Municipal Airport; additionally, T.F. Green Airport in Warwick, RI is roughly 36 miles away. Providence is 25 miles away and Boston is 58 miles away (MapQuest). Westport is part of the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority, which runs buses between Westport, Fall River, New Bedford, and Dartmouth (State of Massachusetts 2005). Interstate 195 runs through Westport, as do Routes 6, 24 and 88.

The commercial fishing industry in Westport is based around Westport Point, with easy access to the waters of Buzzard's Bay (Town of Westport 2005). There is one town dock whose upkeep is funded by commercial fishermen, and which is used exclusively by commercial fishermen (Hall-Arber et al. 2001). Commercial vessels also use Lee's Wharf, next door to the

⁵ Personal Communication, Richard Earle, Westport Shellfish Constable/Harbormaster, PO Box 337, Westport Point, MA 02791, 8/2/05

⁶ Jeanne Girard, Westport Fishermen's Association, personal communication, 8/5/05

town dock. Fishermen can unload at one of these two docks; catch is sold to local seafood markets, or to a van that comes from New Bedford to purchase lobsters.⁷ [F.L. Tripp and Sons, Inc.](#) offers a marina for recreational vessels as well as a boatyard with haul out and repair services and diesel fuel in Westport Point. [Pine Hill Equipment](#) in Westport manufactures and installs hydraulic equipment for marine and land use, including gear for commercial fishing vessels.

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES⁸

Commercial

There are roughly 30 fishing vessels stationed at the town dock, all of which are lobster boats. Westport Lobster Company used to harvest lobsters and sell them wholesale, but today the company maintains just two small boats and is only in the retail business, buying their lobsters wholesale from New Bedford, which were shipped from Canada. The owner noted, “We were smart. We got out of that business”.⁹ Most of the commercial fishing in town is lobster fishing; there are 5-6 offshore lobster boats and 10-12 inshore lobster boats. There are also two boats fishing for scallops on day trips, one of which is owned by the Westport Lobster Company.¹⁰ In addition, as of 2007 roughly 55 residents hold commercial shellfishing licenses from the town Shellfish Department.¹¹

The most valuable landings in Westport in 2006 were lobster; lobster was also the most valuable species for 1997-2006 average landings (see Table 1). Landings of lobster had declined in 2006 from the ten year average value, however. Monkfish was second most valuable; monkfish had also declined in 2006. Overall, the level of landings in Westport was at its highest point in 2000, with value of over \$3.5 million; it declined to \$1.5 million in 2006 (see Table 2). The value of landings for home ported vessels was much higher, with a value of just under \$3.3 million in 2006. This indicates that many of the vessels home ported in Westport offload their catch elsewhere; informants in the community indicated many vessels bring their catch to New Bedford. The number of vessels home ported in Westport has declined over time, from a high of 50 in 2001 to 30 in 2005.

⁷ Personal Communication, Richard Earle, Westport Shellfish Constable/Harbormaster, PO Box 337, Westport Point, MA 02791, 8/2/05

⁸ 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.

⁹ Personal Communication, Westport Lobster Co., 915 Main Rd. Westport, MA 02790, 8/2/05

¹⁰ Personal Communication, Richard Earle, Westport Shellfish Constable/Harbormaster, PO Box 337, Westport Point, MA 02791, 8/2/05

¹¹ Profile review comment, Gary Sherman, Shellfish Warden, PO Box 337, Westport Point, MA 02791, September 27, 2007

Landings by Species

Table 1. Dollar value of Federally Managed Groups of landing in Westport

	Average from 1997-2006	2006 only
Lobster	1,130,560	864,616
Monkfish	464,954	192,637
Other¹²	274,128	375,363
Scallop	37,579	76,988
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	36,728	31,875
Skate	23,688	24,732
Largemesh Groundfish¹³	6,081	12,018
Bluefish	3,227	2,915
Dogfish	3,016	777
Surf Clams, Ocean Quahog	1,835	60
Squid, Mackerel, Butterfish	1,744	185
Smallmesh Groundfish¹⁴	38	0
Tilefish	9	0

Vessels by Year¹⁵

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	45	42	2,521,190	1,214,613
1998	41	37	2,510,881	1,234,597
1999	45	38	3,950,297	1,715,237
2000	48	41	3,665,714	3,526,231
2001	50	40	3,475,775	2,504,608
2002	42	38	3,222,905	2,750,143
2003	40	37	2,507,892	1,434,512
2004	35	34	2,161,178	1,356,592
2005	30	26	3,211,329	2,517,175
2006	32	25	3,291,388	1,582,166

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

Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence¹⁶

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)

¹² "Other" species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group

¹³ Largemesh groundfish: cod, winter flounder, yellowtail flounder, American plaice, sand-dab flounder, haddock, white hake, redfish, and pollock

¹⁴ Smallmesh multi-species: red hake, ocean pout, mixed hake, black whiting, silver hake (whiting)

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

Recreational

Shellfishing is a popular activity within the Westport River; however, 23% of shellfish beds in the river are permanently closed and an additional 53% are seasonally restricted because of bacterial contamination in the river (WRWA 2005a). The town Shellfish Department has roughly 670 family shellfish harvesting permits issued to residents and an additional 55 non-resident family permits issued in 2007.¹⁷ Westport also has a number of [charter fishing vessels](#), including one that specializes in [fly fishing](#) for tuna.

Subsistence

Subsistence fishing is known to occur in Westport, but as much of this activity is likely done illegally – taking undersized fish and shellfish, harvesting in closed areas, and harvesting regulated species without a permit – the extent of such fisheries cannot be estimated with any degree of accuracy.¹⁸

FUTURE

Some of the Westport River's shellfishing beds that had previously been permanently closed to shellfishing were recently moved to the seasonal closure list, allowing more shellfishing in the River and indicating that the water quality of the Westport River is improving. The recovery is due largely to the efforts by the town, conservation organizations, and residents.¹⁹

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¹⁷ Profile review comment, Gary Sherman, Shellfish Warden, PO Box 337, Westport Point, MA 02791, September 27, 2007

¹⁸ Profile review comment, Vin Malkowski, MA Division of Marine Fisheries, October 5, 2007

¹⁹ Personal Communication, Richard Earle, Westport Shellfish Constable/Harbormaster, PO Box 337, Westport Point, MA 02791, 8/2/05

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