

WACHAPREAGUE, VA¹

Community Profile²

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Regional orientation

The city of Wachapreague, Virginia (37.60 °N, 75.69°W) is located in Accomack County. It is 233 miles from New York City, 115 miles from Washington DC and 200 miles from Philadelphia, PA. The town has a total land area of 0.3mi² and the town itself contains no water in the form of lakes or rivers but the Wachapreague Channel goes from the town through a marsh and out to the barrier islands (USGS 2008). This access to the ocean makes Wachapreague a popular place for fishermen (Class Act Sportfishing Charters 2005).



Map 1. Location of Wachapreague, VA (US Census Bureau 2000)

Historical/Background

Members of the Algonquian Indian Tribe had several villages in what is today Wachapreague. In 1662 Nathaniel Bradford received 1,000 acres of land that would one day become the town. A few families moved to the area and by the 1800's it became a busy port. Capt. John Finney, a member of the town, built a main road from his plantation to the waterfront. He then sold some land to the Powell brothers and they re-named that village Powellton. They had a mercantile and shipping business that shipped farm produce to New York City (City of

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."

Wachapreague nd). At the same time, commercial fishing was growing in importance here, with oyster, clam, and finfish houses opening along the waterfront to meet an increasing demand for shellfish in New Jersey, New York, and New England.

In 1902, Wachapreague was given a charter by the state of Virginia (Oles 2005). In the same year, the Wachapreague Hotel was built and attracted a large number of hunters and fishermen, which provided work for charter boats and guides. This hotel was an important part of the local economy until World War II when charter fishing declined, in part due to more affordable boats (the hotel burned down in 1978) (City of Wachapreague nd). Wachapreague reportedly has the oldest charter fleet in Virginia (Oles 2005). Today, the town is known for its tourism and active recreational fishing industry (City of Wachapreague nd). It is known sometimes as the “Flounder Fishing Capital of the World” (Oles 2005).

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data, Wachapreague has a total population of 236, down 18.9% from the reported population of 291 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this total in 2000, 53.4% were female and 46.6% were male. The median age is 55.6 years and 90.7% of the population was 21 years or older while 39.8% was 62 or older.

Wachapreague’s age structure (see Figure 1) shows a preponderance of residents in the 50 to 69 years age groups, with a greater number of females in the 50-59 year old group. The age group of 20-29 is smaller compared to the other age groups, suggesting that young people are leaving the community after high school.

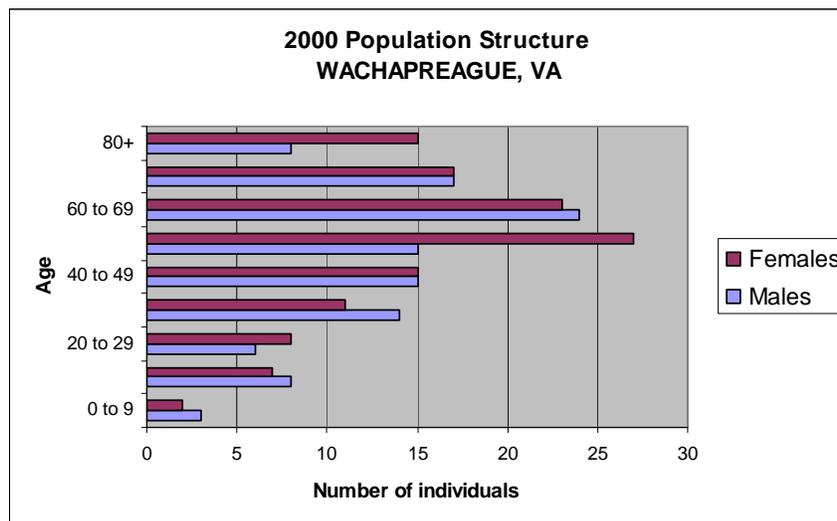


Figure 1. Wachapreague’s population structure by sex in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

The majority of the population White (93.4%) with 2.5% of residents Black or African American, none Asian, 0.5% Native American, and none Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (see Figure 2). Only 1.7% of the total population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (see Figure 3). Residents linked their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including:

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.

English (24.4%), German (7.3%) and Scottish (6.4%). With regard to region of birth, 64.5% were born in Virginia, 31.2% were born in a different state and 3.0% were born outside of the U.S. (including 1.7% who were not United States citizens).

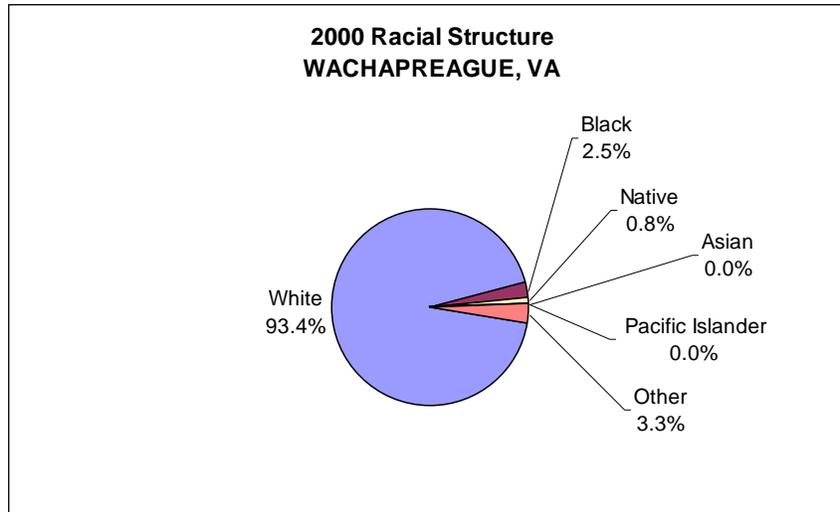


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

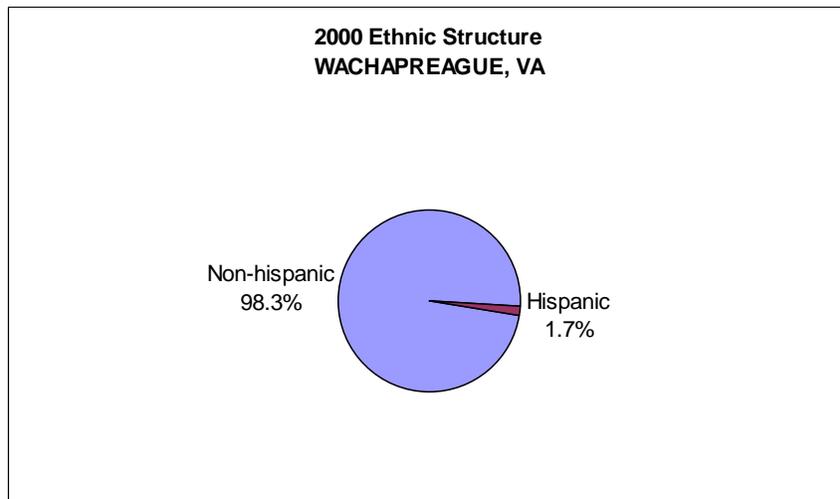


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

For 97.8% of the population, only English is spoken in the home, leaving 2.2% in homes where a language other than English is spoken, including 1.8% of the population who spoke English less than “very well” according to the 2000 Census.

Of the population 25 years and over, 87.9% were high school graduates or higher and 24.7% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 4.5% did not reach ninth grade, 7.6% attended some high school but did not graduate, 41.4% completed high school, 19.7% had some college with no degree, 2.0% received an associate’s degree, 14.1% earned a bachelor’s degree, and 10.6% 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 Accomack County was United Methodist with 47 congregations

and 7,338 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were Southern Baptist Convention (17 and 3,868 adherents), and Catholic (2 and 952 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was down 6.1% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

Issues/Processes

Today, Wachapreague relies more heavily on its recreational fishing industry than its commercial industry. However, the charter fleet has been negatively impacted by fishing regulations in the last few years, particularly with respect to striped bass regulations.⁴ In the past there were four oyster houses and five packing houses, but today there is one marine railway that is rarely used and one packing house that is on the verge of closing. Yet many businesses and people in the town are still dependant on the fishing industry, from the restaurants that sell the fish caught in the area and cater to visiting fishermen, to the many tackle and bait shops. The town government supports the industry to an extent, although zoning regulations make expansion difficult (Oles 2005).

Many charter captains are concerned about the influx of expensive boats operated by “out of towners”. Many of the locals are having a hard time keeping up and are concerned about losing business to these bigger boats (Oles 2005).

Cultural attributes

One of the biggest events in town is the Eastern Shore Marlin Club Tournament. This attracts a large number of fishermen and creates business for all the industries that thrive on recreational fishing. The Marlin Club holds two release-only tournaments per year and the largest is in July (Eastern Shore Marlin Club nd).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

Information on top employers in Wachapreague and even Accomack County could not be found. But the top employers for the Eastern Shore of Virginia, which includes Accomack County, include: Perdue Farms with 1,600 employees, Tyson Farms with 950 employees, Accomack County Public Schools with 950 employees, NASA Wallops Flight Facility with 750 employees and Shore Health Services Inc. with 750 employees (Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission nd).

According to the U.S. Census 2000⁵, 59.8% (128 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (see Figure 4), of which 1.4% were unemployed, none were in the Armed Forces, and 58.4% were employed.

⁴ Community Review Comments, Robert Zang, Wachapreague Harbormaster, Town Hall, PO Box 242, Wachapreague, VA 23480, September 21, 2007

⁵ 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.

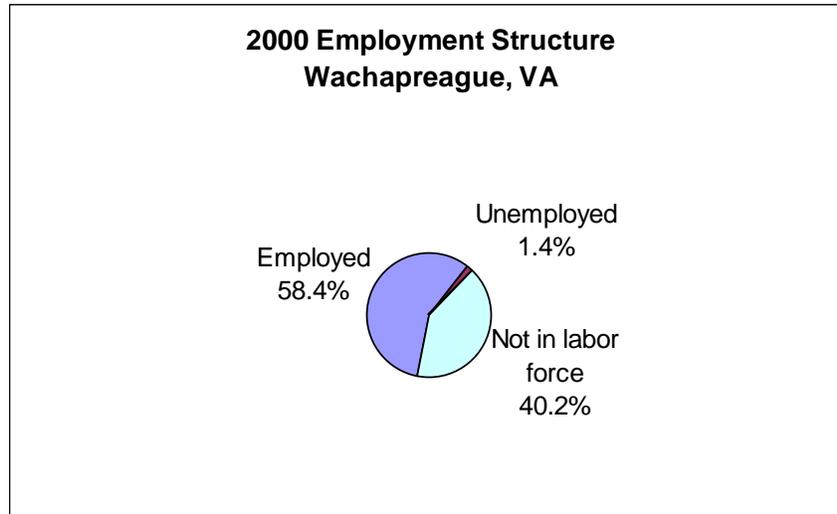


Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

According to Census 2000 data, jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 3 positions or 2.4% of all jobs. Self-employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 6 positions or 4.8% of all jobs. Educational, health/ social services (16.0%), transportation and warehousing, and utilities (13.6%) public administration (13.0%) and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (11.2%) were the primary industries.

Median household income in Wachapreague was \$36,625 (up 83.9% from \$19,917 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and per capita income was \$21,680. For full-time year-round workers, males made approximately 40.6% more than females.

The average family in Wachapreague consists of 2.3 persons. With respect to poverty, 2.9% of families (down from 8.8% from 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 7.7% of individuals earn below the official 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, 43.5% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Wachapreague had a total of 225 housing units of which 59.1% were occupied and 95.6% were detached one unit homes. More than half (61.6%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes, vans, and boats accounted for 2.6% of the total housing units; 97.4% of detached units have between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$79,300. Of vacant housing units, 32.4% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, while of occupied units 19.5% were renter occupied.

Government

The government of Wachapreague consists of a mayor and six other members of the town council. Each member of the town council serves a two-year term. The town council has the power to appoint a town clerk, town treasurer, town sergeant and other general town officers (Town of Wachapreague 1946).

Fishing involvement in government

The town council appoints a harbormaster to oversee the town marina and many of the governments zoning regulations to restrict fishery expansion.

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) is a State Agency established in 1875 to preserve Virginia's marine and aquatic resources, including all tidal waters. The VMRC's Fisheries Management Division aids in the planning of state, interstate, and federal management organizations. Its Fisheries Advisory Council helps agencies create and implement management plans for both commercial and recreational fishery species. The Commission's headquarters are located in Newport News (VMRC nd).

Institutional

Fishing associations

The Eastern Shore Marlin Club, which makes its home in Wachapreague, is a group of sportfishermen in the area that hosts two annual release-only billfish tournaments. The largest one is in July and is a very popular event in the town that brings in a lot of business (Eastern Shore Marlin Club nd).

Eastern Shore Working Waterman's Association represents commercial fishermen, and many commercial fishermen value its president as their only representation (Oles 2005). There is also the Eastern Shore Anglers Club of Accomack County which represents recreational fishing interests.⁶

Fishing assistance centers

Information on fishing assistance centers in Wachapreague is unavailable through secondary data collection.

Other fishing related organizations

Information on other fishing related organizations in Wachapreague is unavailable through secondary data collection.

Physical

Wachapreague is located about 30 miles south of Maryland and 35 miles north of the Chesapeake Bridge Tunnel. The town is located about 4 miles off of US Highway 13 via Rt. 180. It is about 6 miles away from the Accomack County Airport, which is located in Melfa, VA. This airport is part of the Accomack County Industrial Park and is used mostly by businesses. Wachapreague is about 70 miles away from Norfolk International Airport (MapQuest nd). In addition, [Greyhound](#) and [Trailways](#) both offer bus service to Wachapreague.

The [Wachapreague Seaside Marina](#) provides many fishing related services to residents and visitors who come to fish. They have a tackle shop that provides both equipment and bait, charter boat services, rental boats and slips, some that are newly built and can accommodate boats up to 60 feet in length. They also have a restaurant that serves local seafood for dinner. The port of Wachapreague town marina offers a boat ramp and slips for rental. It is run by the town harbormaster appointed by the town council (City of Wachapreague nd). The marina has a capacity of 23 slips for 20-foot boats and 17 slips for boats up to 45-feet.⁷ Most of these businesses are located along Wachapreague Channel.

⁶ Community Review Comments, Robert Zang, Wachapreague Harbormaster, Town Hall, PO Box 242, Wachapreague, VA 23480, September 21, 2007

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INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES⁸

Commercial

Of landed species in Wachapreague, those in the “other” species grouping are by far the most valuable (see Table). However, 2006 landings of “other” species were less than one-tenth the average value for 1997-2006. Overall, landings in Wachapreague were significant in the years 1998-2002, and then declined considerably.

The number of vessels home ported in Wachapreague has gone up from a low of 9 in 1997 to a high of 17 in 2003 (see Table). The number of vessels whose owners make their home in Wachapreague has stayed constant over the years varying only between 8 and 10 between 1997 and 2003 and 2006. Historical research, however, suggests that 75 to 80 boats would use the ports of Wachapreague 30 years ago during the mackerel season. The commercial boats that do use Wachapreague today also land their catch in other Virginia ports such as Virginia Beach and Chincoteague, as well as some distant North Carolina ports. Many vessels also come here during the fall months to fish with conch pots (Oles 2005).

Landings by Species

Table 1. Rank Value of Landings for Federally Managed Groups

Species	Rank Value of Average Landings from 1997-2006
Other ⁹	1
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	2
Dogfish	3
Scallop	4
Bluefish	5
Squid, Mackerel, Butterfish	6
Monkfish	7
Lobster	8
Skate	9
Largemouth Groundfish ¹⁰	10
Smallmouth Groundfish ¹¹	11

(Note: Only rank value is provided because value information is confidential in ports with fewer than three vessels or fewer than three dealers, or where one dealer predominates in a particular species and would therefore be identifiable.)

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 “Other” species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group

¹⁰ Largemouth Groundfish : cod, winter flounder, yellowtail flounder, am. Plaice, sand-dab flounder, haddock, white hake, redfish, and pollock

¹¹ Smallmouth Multi-species : red hake, ocean pout, mixed hake, black whiting, silver hake (whiting)

Vessels by Year¹²

Table 2. Federal Vessel Permits Between 1997-2006

Year	# Vessels (home ported)	# Vessels (owner's city)
1997	9	8
1998	11	8
1999	13	10
2000	14	9
2001	15	9
2002	14	9
2003	17	10
2004	16	9
2005	16	9
2006	17	10

(Note: # Vessels home ported = No. of permitted vessels with location as homeport, # Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence¹³)

Recreational

Wachapreague is primarily a recreational fishing town. There are many companies that charter boats for tourists and many tourists come for the fishing. The town thrives on this business, as restaurants and shops depend on tourists drawn to the many fishing tournaments the town hosts (Oles 2005).

The town is known for their flounder fishing and there is a flounder tournament every spring. Also, as mentioned earlier, the Eastern Shore Marlin Club hosts two tournaments each year (Eastern Shore Marlin Club nd). Between 2001- 2005, there were 18 charter and party vessels making 1,432 total trips registered in logbook data by charter and party vessels in Wachapreague carrying a total of 7,304 anglers.

Subsistence

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

FUTURE

In recent years, a directed fishery of dogfish ended and closure of the shad fishing industry is predicted. While clam aquaculture is in development, many voice the end of the commercial fishing industry in Wachapreague. A commercial fisherman in Wachapreague expressed concern over the future of commercial fishing in the area. He noted the high unemployment of fishermen in the area and that many of them lack other skills. Many have little choice but to get jobs in the chicken processing facilities nearby or to try to get jobs working for someone else in the fishing industry (Oles 2005).

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

According to one community member, the future of fishing in Wachapreague is uncertain and dependent on such factors as fuel costs, less restrictive fishing regulations, and development issues.¹⁴

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