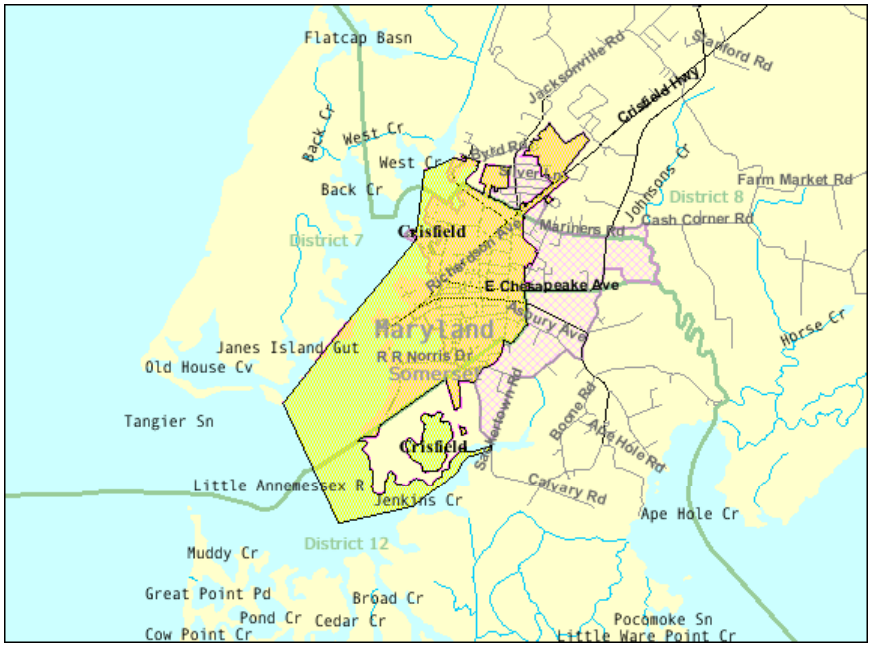
CRISFIELD, MD[1]
Community Profile[2]

PEOPLE AND PLACES
Regional orientation

The city of Crisfield, Maryland (37.98˚ N, 75.85˚ W) is located on the Chesapeake Bay in Somerset County, bordering on Tangier Sound by the mouth of the Little Annemessex River. Crisfield has a total area of three square miles, of which 1.6 square miles is land and 1.4 square miles is water (USGS 2008). It is the southernmost town in Maryland (City of Crisfield 2008).



Map 1. Location of Crisfield, MD (US Census Bureau 2000)

Historical/Background

Crisfield was originally called Annemessex Neck, after the Annemessex Indians who hunted here. The river adjacent to Crisfield still bears their name. The first European to settle in this area was Benjamin Somers, in 1663 (Goldsborough 2008). The town was then called Somers Cove. In 1854, a Coast and Geodetic survey discovered a large number of oyster beds in Tangier Sound near what is now Crisfield. John W. Crisfield pushed for the railroad to extend to Crisfield from Salisbury in order to harvest and ship the oysters, recognizing the importance of this resource (Paul 2008). The railroad to Crisfield was completed in 1866 (Goldsborough 2008), linking Crisfield and its oysters with the markets of the Northeast. In recognition of this, the

---

[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."

town fathers renamed Somers Cove in honor of John W. Crisfield. Crisfield eventually developed a significant seafood shipping and processing industry, with a large ice house to keep the seafood fresh. Agricultural packing houses were also established here which canned vegetables and took advantage of the presence of the railroad to ship them (Paul 2008). Crisfield officially became a town in 1872, after receiving a charter from the Maryland Legislature. Most of the early houses here were built on pilings over the water or in the marsh, and much of the swamp was filled in with oyster shells. By the late 1800s Crisfield had regular steamer service to both Norfolk and Baltimore, and by 1910 the Custom House in Crisfield had the longest list of sailing vessels of any port in the United States. Today, hundreds of working vessels travel in and out of Crisfield Harbor fishing for oysters, crabs, and other seafood (Goldsborough 2008). Crisfield is often called both "The Seafood Capital of the World" (Paul 2008) and "The Crab Capital of the World" (Crisfield Heritage Foundation 2008).

Demographics[3]

According to Census data (US Census Bureau 2000a), Crisfield had a total population of 2,723 in 2000, down 5.4% from a reported population of 2,880 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this 2000 total, 43.0% were males and 57.0% were females. The median age was 36.6 years and 68.3% of the population was 21 years or older while 20.9% were 62 or older.

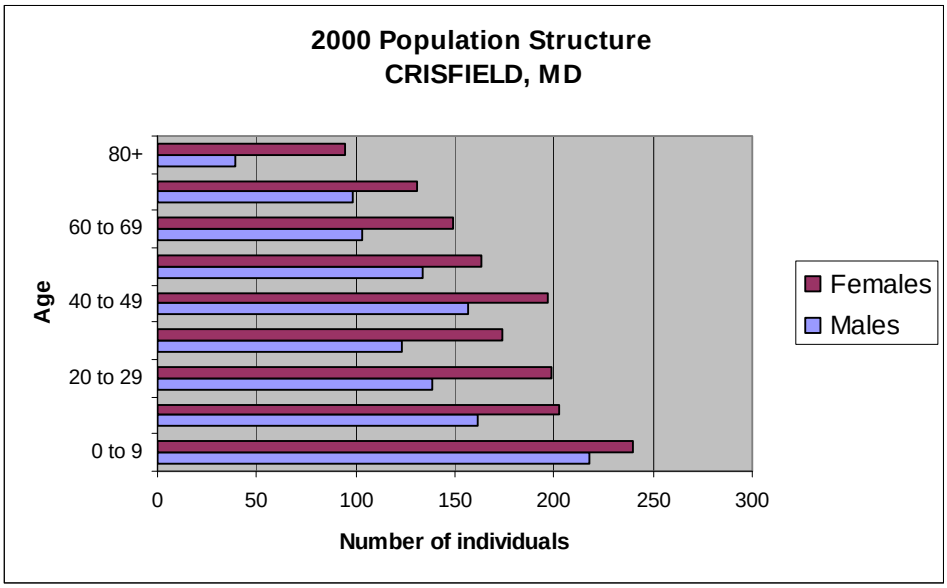


Figure 1. Crisfield's population structure by sex in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

The population structure for Crisfield (Figure 1) shows the city has a very young population; the greatest percentages of residents were children, in the 0-9 and 10-19 age groups. Unlike many communities, Crisfield does not show a large dip in the population structure for residents in the 20-29 age bracket. Women outnumber men in all age categories, and significantly so in many of them.

[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.

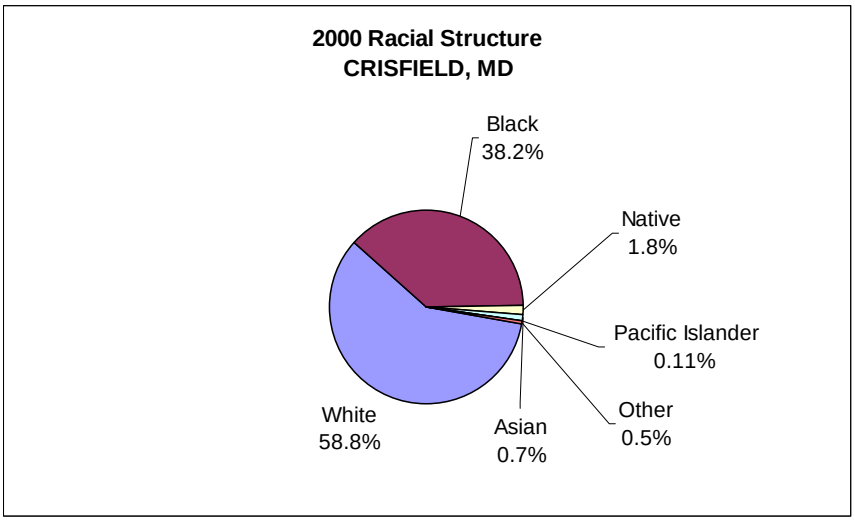


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

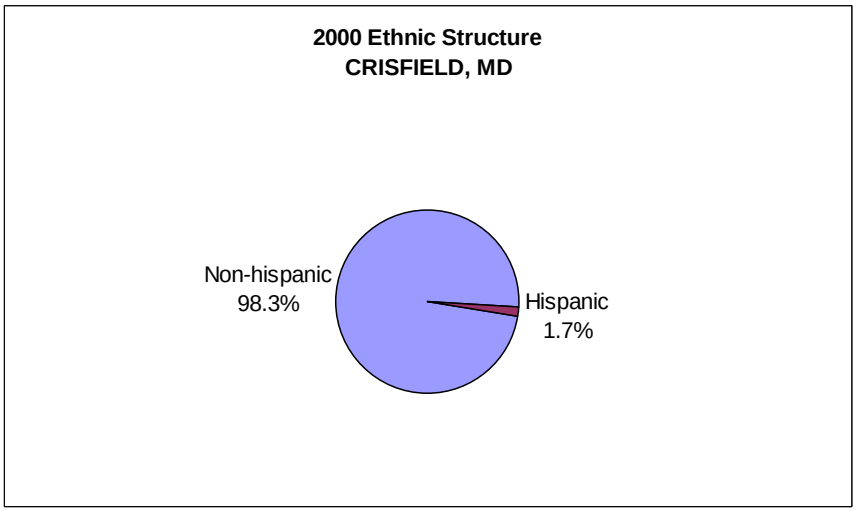


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

The majority of the population is white (58.8%) with 38.2% of residents black or African American, 0.7% Asian, 1.8% Native American, and 0.1% Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (Figure 2). Only 1.7 % of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (Figure 3). Residents traced their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including: English (12.1%), Irish (8.7%), German (4.6%), and other ancestries (36.7%). With regard to region of birth, 79.4% were born in Maryland, 19.0% were born in a different state, and 1.3% were born outside the US (including 0.8% who were not US citizens).

For 95.9% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 4.1% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, including 0.9% of the population who spoke English less than “very well” (US Census Bureau 2000).

Of the population 25 years and over, 63.4% were high school graduates or higher, and 4.7% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Of the population 25 years and over, 16.7% did not reach ninth grade, 19.9% attended some high school but did not graduate, 42.9% completed high school, 12.3% had some college with no degree, 3.5% received their associate’s degree, 3.0% earned their bachelor’s degree, and 1.7% received either a graduate or professional degree.

Although religious percentages are not available through the US Census, according to the Association of Religion Data Archive (ARDA) in 2000 the religion with the highest number of congregations and adherents in Somerset County was the United Methodist Church, with 39 congregations and 4,381 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were Southern Baptist Convention (5 with 925 adherents) and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) (2 with 801 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was down 7.9% from 1990 (ARDA 2000).

There are over 30 churches in and around Crisfield along the Route 413 corridor. These include fifteen Methodist, four Pentecostal, and two Baptist churches, one church each of the AME, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholic, Mennonite, and Presbyterian denominations, and seven non-denominational churches (City of Crisfield 2008).

Issues/Processes

Crisfield's population declined by 23 percent from 1960 to 2000, a decrease attributable to a decline in the Chesapeake's fishing industry as well as a decline in industrial and manufacturing employment (Jakubiak and Associates Inc. 2007). This trend then reversed itself, making Crisfield one of the fastest growing towns on Maryland's Eastern Shore (City of Crisfield 2008). The Delmarva Peninsula, which for many years had little development, is seeing a large increase in the number of people moving there and buying homes, particularly from the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. areas. Crisfield in particular has seen a number of condominium developments built in the last few years, which residents worry is changing the character of the community. In many cases the developers are buying land from watermen (Neville 2007). From 2003 through 2006, 250 new condominium units, many selling for around $1 million, were built, and 300 more were scheduled for development by 2008. Many in Crisfield worry the soaring property values will force them to move (Hart 2006). Of course, recent (2008) downtowns in the housing market nationwide will likely be felt here as well.

As of 2007 blue crab numbers in the Chesapeake had fallen 70% since the 1990s, and scientists continue (in 2008) to be concerned about a possible crash in the population. Poor water quality and overharvesting are considered causes of the decline; of particular concern is the number of female crabs being harvested by watermen. While the Chesapeake Bay's crabs are not likely to go extinct, crabbers are having a tough time making ends meet between the rising cost of fuel and an influx of imported crab meat; both Maryland and Virginia are seeking disaster funds to aid watermen and processors (MD DNR 2008).

As numbers of fish and shellfish in the Chesapeake decline, there are stricter fishing regulations and rules (Nitkin 2007, Kobell 2008). Recently, the State imposed additional regulations for catching female crabs (DNR 2008), upsetting local watermen who feel they have a difficult enough time making a living[4] (Kobell, 2008).

Cultural attributes

Crisfield hosts a number of waterfront-related events, including an annual Crisfield Waterman's Festival in October, as well as an annual crab and clam bake. The city hosts the annual Hard Crab Derby each Labor Day Weekend, featuring crab races, a crab cooking contest, crab picking contest, boat races, a boat docking contest, and numerous other events. In May the city features the Soft Shell Spring Fair at the city dock, which includes the Waterman's Hall of Fame Awards (Crisfield Area Chamber of Commerce 2008). In past years, Crisfield has also

[4] Community Reviewer comment, Ruth Hazen, August 18, 2008, Collections Manager, Deale Area Historic Society.

hosted a fishing tournament, the Annual Scorchy Tawes Fishing Tournament, which was not being held in 2008 (Crisfield Heritage Foundation 2008).

The J. Millard Tawes Historical Museum in Crisfield is dedicated to the history of Maryland's Lower Shore, and features exhibits on seafood processing and harvesting, among other displays. The museum is the starting place for the Port of Crisfield Walking Tour, which takes visitors through the port area of the city, including a visit to a modern crab and oyster processing facility, allowing visitors to witness the workings of the seafood processing industry (Crisfield Heritage Foundation 2008). The Crisfield Heritage Foundation advertises that visitors to its Cedar Island Marsh Sanctuary can view the work boats, crab shanties, and watermen at neighboring Jenkins Creek as an attraction of the sanctuary.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

According to the 2000 Census[5], 53.1% (1,082 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (Figure 4), of which 6.5% were unemployed and none were in the Armed Forces.

According to US Census Bureau (2000), jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 39 positions or 4.1% of all jobs. Self-employed workers – a category where fishermen might be found – accounted for 107 positions or 11.3% of jobs. Educational, health and social services (24.8%), retail trade (15.8%), public administration (13.6%), and manufacturing (12.5%) were the primary industries.

Seafood processing is an important industry for Crisfield, with a number of crab picking houses and other seafood processing facilities located here. Southern Connection Seafood, the largest of these, has 120 seasonal employees. Handy Crab Company and MeTompkin Bay Oyster Company are other seafood processing facilities with around 50 seasonal employees each located in Crisfield (SCEDC 2008). However, a number of the former processing facilities in the downtown area today remain vacant (Jakubiak and Associates 2007).

The top ten employers in Somerset County where Crisfield residents may work are as follows: Eastern Correctional Institution (979 employees); University of Maryland Eastern Shore (950 employees); Lankford/SYSCO Foods (750 employees); McCready Hospital (275 employees); PNC (250 employees); Manokin Manor (165 employees); Rubberset Company (160 employees); Somerset County Developmental Center (150 employees); Custom Pak (132 employees); and Southern Connection (120 employees) (SCEDC 2008).

[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.

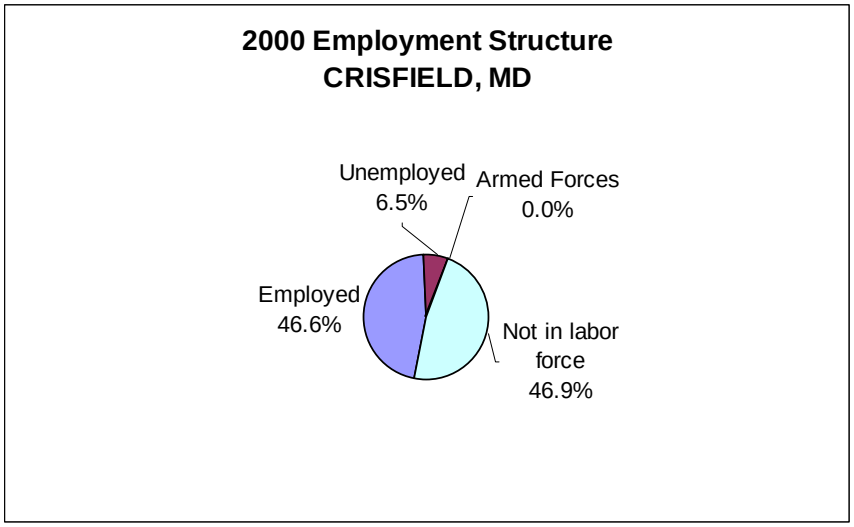


Figure 1. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

Median 2000 household income in Crisfield was $17,979 (up 22.0% from $14,740 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and median per capita income was $12,387. For full-time year round workers, males made approximately 45.5% more per year than females.

The average family in Crisfield consisted of 2.92 persons. With respect to poverty, 30.5% of families (up from 23.8% in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 34.2% of individuals were below the US 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, 65.1% of all families of any size earned less than $35,000 per year.

In 2000 Crisfield had a total of 1,357 housing units, of which 86.4% were occupied and 57.2% were detached one-unit homes. More than one quarter (28.1%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes accounted for 0.9% of housing units; 90.7% of detached units had between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was $68,900. Of vacant housing units, 23.8% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units, 53.6% were renter occupied.

Government

Crisfield has a mayor/council/manager form of government. The city council is made up of five elected members and the mayor (City of Crisfield 2008).

Fishery involvement in government

The comprehensive plan for Crisfield designates a Waterfront Planning Area, recognizing the city's working waterfront and prioritizing working waterfront uses in this zone. The comprehensive plan is also focused on maintaining public access to the waterfront within this zone (Jakubiak and Associates 2007).

Institutional

Fishing associations

"The Maryland Watermen's Association (MWA) is dedicated to the interests of all who derive beauty & benefit from Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Waters." While the MWA focuses primarily on bay fishing issues, they also represent ocean fishermen where necessary. The MWA still

broadly represent all those who work on the water in/of Maryland. The President of the Association also serves on the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council which focuses on bay and ocean fisheries issues.[6] The MWA is based in Annapolis, MD (about 126 miles from Crisfield). Some local watermen may also be members of Tangier Sound Watermen's Association. Also, some informal watermen's associations have risen over the past few years, mainly in response to new regulations[7].

Fishing assistance centers

Information on fishing assistance centers in Crisfield was either unavailable through secondary data collection or the practice does not exist.

Other fishing related organizations

The Crisfield Heritage Foundation is committed to preserving the heritage of Crisfield and the surrounding area, and to educating people about this heritage, including the community's long ties to the seafood industry. The University of Maryland Eastern Shore, about 21 miles from Crisfield, has a graduate degree program in Marine, Estuarine, and Environmental Sciences, including courses in Fisheries Science

Physical

Crisfield's harbor is lined with seafood packing plants, and has a large city pier (Southern Seafood Connection 2008). A number of boats are found within Somers Cove; some of the crab boats are also docked in Jenkins Creek (Crisfield Heritage Foundation 2008). Somers Cove Marina is a 515 slip marina located in Crisfield. The marina is home to a number of charter and party boats, as well as a bait and tackle shop and two fish cleaning stations (DNR 2008). Gouldsborough's Marine, adjacent to Somers Cove Marina, sells supplies and services boats (Gouldsborough's Marine 2008). Crisfield has a boat builder, Chesapeake Boats, which designs boats in the style of working lobster or crab boats. Eddie Health's Crab Pots and Supply Co. is a local manufacturer of crab pots (Crisfield Area Chamber of Commerce 2008). Ferries run between Crisfield and Smith and Tangier Islands (Goldsborough 2008).

Crisfield is the southernmost town in Maryland, and is located at the end of Route 413. Crisfield is approximately 21 miles from Princess Anne, 32 miles from Salisbury, 124 miles from Annapolis, and 153 miles from Baltimore by car. Crisfield has a municipal airport, the Crisfield and Somerset County Airport. The next nearest airport is the Accomack County Airport in Virginia, 24 miles away, and the nearest large commercial airport is the Baltimore Washington International Airport, 147 miles away (Google 2008). Shore Transit runs buses between Crisfield, Salisbury, and Princess Anne.

---

[6] Community Review Comments, Kelly Clements Barnes, Administrative Assistant, Maryland Watermen's Association, September 13, 2007

[7] Pers. com. Dr. Michael Paolisso, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Maryland.

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES[8]

Commercial

According to one study, in 1999 there were around 100 full- and part-time crab fishermen in Crisfield (McCay and Cieri 2000). Crisfield has a large number of seafood processing facilities. The MeTompkin Bay Oyster Company in Crisfield processes soft shell crabs, crab meat, and oysters. Some of the crabs and oysters processed here are caught locally; some of the oysters come from the south and west, and much of the crabmeat comes from Asia. Southern Connection Seafood is a large processor and wholesaler with two processing facilities in the Crisfield area, producing over $12 million in sales annually. In addition to hard crabs and oysters, they also sell and process swordfish, tuna, clams, lobster, and other fish. Handy Crab Company is another crab processing company, headquartered in Salisbury but with a processing facility in Crisfield and several others in Asia. The Crab Place sells crabs and other fresh or prepared seafood products via mail order. A number of other processors and wholesalers are listed for the Crisfield area (Crisfield Area Chamber of Commerce 2008).

In Maryland, as to a lesser extent Virginia, most reporting of state-managed species enters the federal data bases by port only via vessels with federal permits. Any landings by state-registered only vessels with be provided to the NMFS database via waterbody code rather than port code. Landings to individual ports cannot be disaggregated from within these waterbody codes. Much commercial fishing in Crisfield is of blue crabs and oysters, which are state managed species; these landings will not appear in federal landings data unless landed by a federally permitted vessel, and thus are fully not reflected below - even in the "other" category. According to the federal landings, the most valuable landings for Crisfield for 1997-2006 were in the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass species grouping. However, these were minimal. Similarly, only federally-permitted vessels are in the federal permit database. Vessels which are permitted at the state level only will not appear in the tables below. In most years, there were only one or two vessels home ported. Further, any vessels landing state managed species only will not be included in these totals.

Landings by Species

Table 1. Rank Value of Landings for Federally Managed Groups

Species	Rank Value of Average Landings from 1997-2006
Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass	1
Other[9]	2
Bluefish	3
Butterfish, Mackerel, Squid	4

(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.

Vessels by Year[10]

Table 2. Federal Vessel Permits between 1997-2006

Year	# Vessels home ported	# Vessels (owner's city)
1997	1	1
1998	2	1
1999	2	1
2000	2	1
2001	2	1
2002	2	1
2003	2	1
2004	2	1
2005	4	3
2006	5	4

(Note: # Vessels home ported = No. of permitted vessels with location as homeport, # Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence[11]*)*

Recreational

There are a number of charter and party boats based in Crisfield. Prime Time Fishing advertises fishing for trout, spot, croakers, bluefish, flounder, and occasionally drum, as well as trolling for rockfish in the spring and fall. Chesapeake Angling is another charter business out of Crisfield specializing in light tackle and fly fishing trips. James Island State Park, just north of Crisfield, offers recreational fishing and crabbing opportunities as well (DNR 2008).

Subsistence

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

FUTURE

Some in Crisfield worry that the rapid development of condominiums in the town will change the town's character and drive many watermen out of the area. While many of the lots and buildings in Crisfield's downtown are still vacant, many predict these will be developed as well in the near future (Hart 2006). Of course, the 2008 downturn in the general economy and the housing market will likely affect these trends. In January 2008, Maryland's Department of Business and Economic Development (MDBED) approved a $1.3 million Community Development Block Grant to fund the development of an industrial park in Crisfield. The new industrial park is expected to bring 75 new jobs to the city, as well as maintaining 60 existing jobs, and is viewed as a way to offset some of the job losses resulting from the shrinking seafood harvesting and processing industries in Crisfield (MDBED 2008). There are also plans to begin ferry service between Crisfield and Reedville, Virginia, connecting the Eastern and Western shores of Chesapeake Bay and bringing more visitors to Crisfield (City of Crisfield 2008).

[10] 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.

[11] 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.

REFERENCES

City of Crisfield. 2008. The Crisfield Local Government [cited Aug 2008]. Available at: http://www.cityofcrisfield.com/

Crisfield Area Chamber of Commerce. 2008. Crisfield Events for 2007-2008 [cited Aug 2008]. Available at: http://www.crisfieldchamber.com/

Crisfield Heritage Foundation. 2008. J. Millard Tawes Historical Museum [Cited August 2008]. Available at: http://www.crisfieldheritagefoundation.org/

Department of Natural Resources. 2008. Eastern Maryland Public Lands [Cited August 2008]. Available at: http://www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/eastern.html

Google. 2008. Google Maps [cited Aug 2008]. Available from: http://maps.google.com/

Gouldsborough's Marine. 2008. Gouldsborough's Marine [Cited August 2008]. Available from: http://www.crisfield.com/gold/

Goldsborough PL. 2008. A brief history of the City of Crisfield [cited Aug 2008]. Available from: http://www.crisfield.com/

Hart K. 2006. A backwater's incoming tide; condo development brings a sea change to the quiet Eastern Shore town of Crisfield. Washington Post, 2006 Aug 26.

Jakubiak and Associates Inc. 2007. Comprehensive plan: City of Crisfield, Maryland [cited Aug 2008]. Available from: http://www.cityofcrisfield.com/

Kobell R. 2008. Watermen ponder suit over crabbing plans. Baltimore Sun, 2008 Apr 23.

Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development (MDBED). 2008. Grant supports economic development in Crisfield [cited Aug 2008]. 2008 Jan 2. Available from: http://www.choosemaryland.org/

Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR). 2008. In focus: blue crab [cited Oct 2008]. Available at: http://www.dnr.state.md.us/dnrnews/infocus/blue_crab.asp

McCay B, Cieri M. 2000. Fishing ports of the Mid-Atlantic: a report to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Dover DE, April 2000. Available at: http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/econ/cia/impact_studies.html

Neville T. 2007. Rural waterfront oasis that's not far from town [cited Aug 2008]. New York Times, 2007 Sept 28.

Nitkin D. 2007. Push to ease regulation of crabbing hits snag. Baltimore Sun, 2007 Mar 27.

Paul JW. 2008. A short history of Crisfield [cited Aug 2008]. Available from: http://www.crisfieldheritagefoundation.org/

Somerset County Economic Development Commission (SCEDC). 2008. Somerset County Labor Profile [Cited August 2008]. Available from: http://www.somersetcountyedc.org/

US Geological Survey (USGS). 2008. US Board on Geographic Names: Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) [cited Sep 2008]. Available at: http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic/