

# HIGHLANDS, NJ<sup>1</sup>

## Community Profile<sup>2</sup>

### PEOPLE AND PLACES

#### Regional orientation

The borough of Highlands, New Jersey (40.40°N, 73.99°W) is located on the eastern edge of the New Jersey Bayshore in Monmouth County, inside of Sandy Hook. Highlands is only 0.71 square miles in area (Boro of Highlands nd), and lies where the Shrewsbury and Navesink Rivers meet and spill out into Sandy Hook Bay (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).



Map 1. Location of Highlands, NJ (US Census Bureau 2000a)

#### Historical/Background

The area now known as Highlands has a long history; many early European explorers, including Verrazano, Henry Hudson, and a group of Portuguese explorers, had all visited Highlands and its trademark hills by the early 1600s. Mount Mitchell, rising 260 feet above sea level, giving the community its name, is the highest point on the Atlantic coast of the United States. Highlands was originally known as the “Highlands of Navesink”; Navesink, the Indian name for this area, means “good fishing place” (Boro of Highlands nd). Fishing has been a long tradition in this area; the Lenni Lenape Indians fished in the bay before white settlers arrived and the Dutch were fishing here in the 1600s (Jones 2004). This area played an important role in the American Revolution and was occupied by the Loyalists who sought refuge on Sandy Hook until long after the war had ended. Highlands borough was originally part of Middletown township

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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](mailto:Lisa.L.Colburn@noaa.gov).”

until it seceded in 1900. During Prohibition, Highlands became the main port for rum-running to supply New York City; most of the rumrunners were commercial fishermen or clam-diggers.

Boatbuilding was a primary industry in Highlands, and continues to be important today. Clamming was also a mainstay of the community's economy and culture for much of its history; early settlers here learned clamming techniques from the Native Americans (Boro of Highlands nd). A writer in 1890 compared the importance of clams in Highlands to the importance of the whale to Nantucket (Boro of Highlands nd). Until the 1980s, many of Highlands' residents were still employed in commercial fishing, especially commercial clamming. Thanks to the depuration plant, clamming is again an important part of the culture and economy of Highlands. Highlands and Belford are considered to be the two commercial fishing ports on New Jersey's Bayshore, although the fishermen may live anywhere throughout the region. The economy here has also traditionally been largely dependent on tourism. Today, Highlands is increasingly becoming a tourist destination for New York City residents (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

### Demographics<sup>3</sup>

According to Census 2000 data<sup>4</sup>, Highlands had a total population of 5,097, up 5.1% from the reported population of 4,849 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this 2000 total, 50.1% were males and 49.9% were females. The median age was 38.6 years and 78.4% of the population was 21 years or older while 13.7% was 62 or older.

The population structure for Highlands (see Figure 1) shows the largest percentage of residents to be between the ages 30-39, followed by 40-49. Interestingly, for such a large number of residents in these two age categories there are few children in the 0-9 and 10-19 age categories. Unlike many fishing towns, Highlands does not experience a decline in residents for the 20-29 age category.

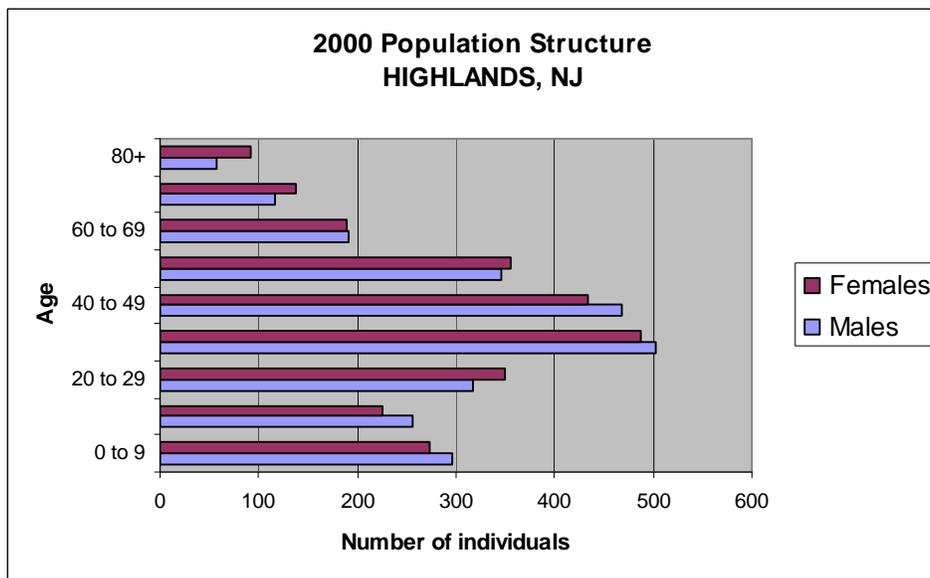


Figure 1. Highland's population structure by sex (US Census Bureau 2000a)

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> These and all census data, unless otherwise referenced, can be found at U.S. Census: American Factfinder 2000 <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html>; census data used are for Highlands borough, NJ (cited Jul 2007)

The majority of the population was white (95.1%), with 1.8% of residents black or African American, 1.4% Asian, 0.6% Native American, and none Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (see Figure 2). Only 4.1% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Residents linked their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including: Irish (33.7%), Italian (19.5%) German (16.8%), and Polish (8.2%). With regard to region of birth, 64.8% were born in New Jersey, 28.2% were born in a different state and 6.0% were born outside of the U.S. (including 3.0% who were not United States citizens).

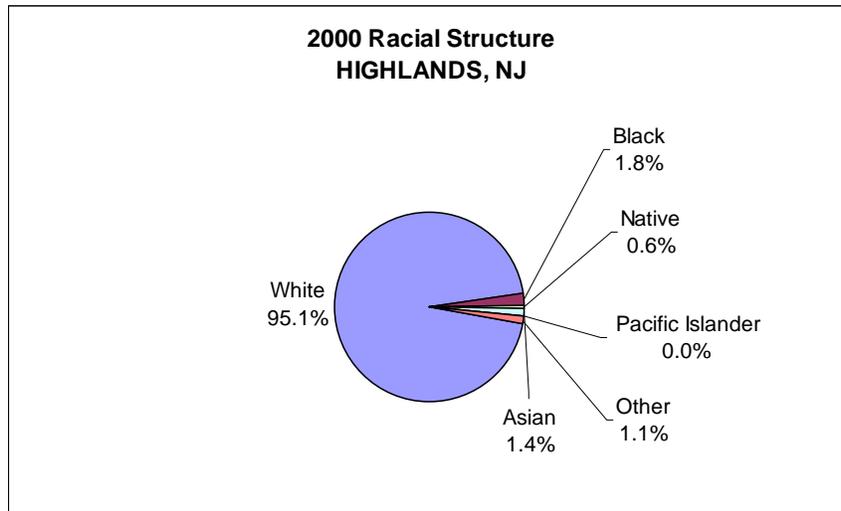


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000a)

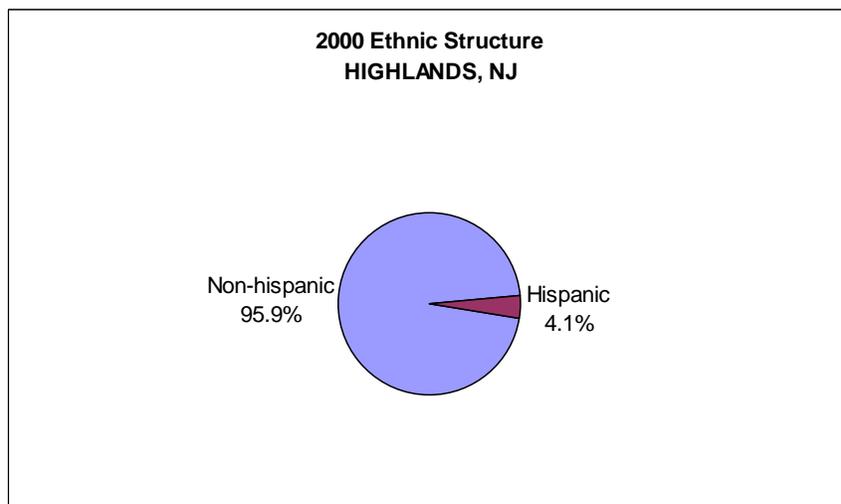


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000a)

For 91.5% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 8.5% in homes where a language other than English was spoken, and including 1.3% of the population who spoke English less than “very well” according to the 2000 Census data.

Of the population 25 years and over, 87.9% were high school graduates or higher and 26.4% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 1.0% did not reach ninth grade, 11.1% attended some high school but did not graduate, 34.8% completed

high school, 22.5% had some college with no degree, 4.1% received an associate's degree, 17.2% earned a bachelor's degree, and 9.2% 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 in 2000, the religion with the highest number of congregations and adherents in Monmouth County was Catholic with 50 congregations and 289,183 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were Jewish (42 with 65,000 adherents), United Methodist (47 with 12,992 adherents), and Muslim (5 with 9,455 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion increased 38.9% from 1990 to 2000 (ARDA 2000). There are three churches listed for Highlands, all of which are Protestant (Boro of Highlands nd).

### **Issues/Processes**

Closures of the depuration plant sometimes occur because of especially cold winters or sewage spills, putting its employees temporarily out of work. Flooding is a big problem in Highlands' streets, and parking is also difficult here. Like other communities in this area, Highlands is facing a problem of gentrification which is forcing out lower-income residents. The commuter ferry, here since the 1980s, has precipitated this situation by allowing people to live here and work in New York City (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

In January 2006, the former president of Certified Clam, David Tauro, was indicted on charges of theft of company assets, for depositing company funds into his personal account. The company was experiencing severe financial difficulties during this time mostly because of Mr. Tauro's theft (Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office 2006).

In 2003, an especially cold winter froze Sandy Hook Bay. Fishermen were unable to harvest clams here for weeks, so state fish and wildlife officials opened the Shark River to harvesting, ordinarily closed because of pollution (Feeney 2003).

Parkertown, as a portion of Highlands was once known, was the locus of a significant commercial clamming industry. Soft clams were harvested, processed, and sold in Highlands until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The only changes to the waterfront in the last 25 years have been condo development and the introduction of a fast-speed ferry. In 1995, a purifying plant for bay clams was built and generally seen as a positive development for the community (McCay et al. 2005).

### **Cultural attributes**

Highlands has an annual Clam Fest each summer. In addition to games and carnival rides, clams are sold at the festival, and visitors can participate in a clam shucking contest (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003). The Twin Lights of Navesink, the first twin lighthouses in the United States which overlook the community, are an important historical landmark in Highlands. Today there is museum on this site which explores the history of the lighthouse and presents the maritime history of Highlands (Twin Lights Historical Society 2006). The borough also hosts a number of fishing tournaments throughout the year (Boro of Highlands nd).

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **Current Economy**

The [James T. White Clam Depuration Plant](#) in Highlands opened in 1995 and employs about 100 people as harvesters, laborers, and other staff. The plant purifies millions of dollars of locally-caught clams. There are about 14 people working in the plant, 11 working in the wholesale operation, and about 70 harvesters. Most of the laborers are Hispanic and commute to

Highlands from surrounding communities. Work in the plant is relatively steady compared with many other options for low-skill workers, such as landscaping. All clams taken from the bay must be treated before human consumption because of elevated pollution levels here (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

While there are no other large employers listed for Highlands, neighboring Middletown and Red Bank have a number of significant employers, including: AT&T (Middletown - 3,300+ employees) (McCay et al. 2005), Food Circus Supermarkets, Inc. (Middletown - 1,263 employees), Visiting Nurses Association of Central Jersey (Red Bank – 769 employees), Brookdale Community College (Lincroft - 737 employees), JCP&L/ First Energy (Red Bank – 529 employees), Marion Security Agency (Red Bank – 340 employees), and T&M Associates (Middletown - 200 employees). There are many other large employers throughout Monmouth County where Highlands residents are likely to be employed (Monmouth County nd). Additionally, many of Highlands' residents commute to work in New York City on the high speed ferry (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

According to the U.S. Census 2000<sup>5</sup>, 68.3% (2,914 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (see Figure 4), of which 3.9% were unemployed, 0.2% were in the Armed Forces, and 64.1% were employed.

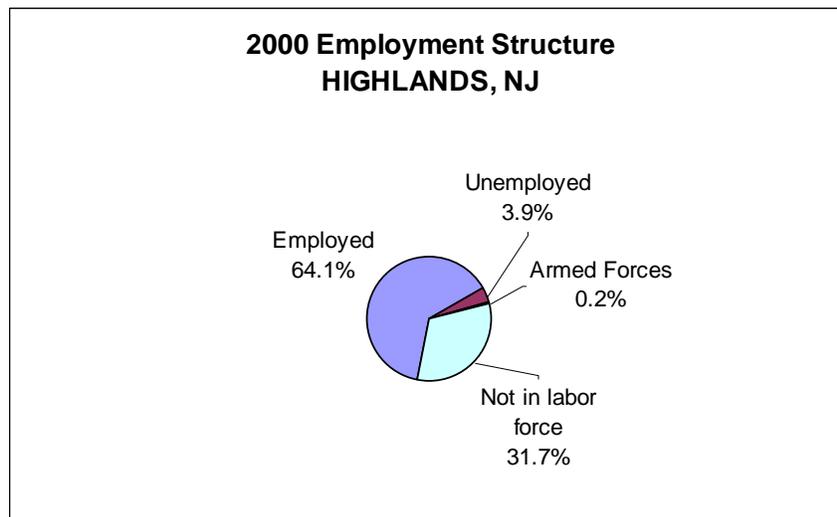


Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000a)

According to Census 2000 data, jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 29 positions or 1.1% of all jobs. Self employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 256 positions or 9.3 % of jobs. Educational, health, and social services (16.8%), professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (13.8%), finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing (11.2%), and retail trade (10.0%) were the primary industries. Median household income in Highlands was \$45,692 (up 41.2% from \$32,364 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and per capita income was \$29,369. For full-time year round workers, males made approximately 60.9% more per year than females.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

The average family in Highlands consisted of 2.9 persons. With respect to poverty, 11.5% of families (up from 5.7% in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 12.3% 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, 36.8% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Highlands had a total of 2,820 housing units of which 86.9% were occupied and 42.7% were detached one unit homes. Close to one quarter (23.4%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes accounted for 5.7% of the total housing units; 97.1% of detached units have between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$139,300. Of vacant housing units, 7.2% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units, 44.9% were renter occupied.

## **Government**

The borough of Highlands is governed by a mayor and five-member borough council (Boro of Highlands nd).

### *Fishery involvement in government*

Highlands has two Waterfront zoning areas. The Master Plan recognizes the importance of the waterfront area to the community's character, but does not specifically mention commercial fishing activity. Waterfront re-development is considered primarily for the purposes of increasing opportunities for recreation and tourism (Boro of Highlands nd).

## **Institutional**

### *Fishing associations*

The Baymen's Protective Association operates the clam depuration plant. The association oversees the plant and the Certified Clams wholesale operations, including all aspects of the businesses. The association holds regular meetings. When the plant makes a profit, (which it has yet to do), shares will be divided among the association's members. The association limits the numbers of clams the plant will process, to ensure its members each have full-time work. They also represent baymen in local and state issues related to clamming (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

[Garden State Seafood Association](#) in Trenton is a statewide organization of commercial fishermen and fishing companies, related businesses and individuals working in common cause to promote the interests of the commercial fishing industry and seafood consumers in New Jersey.

The [Jersey Coast Anglers Association](#) (JCAA) is an association of over 75 saltwater fishing clubs throughout the state. Founded in 1981, the purpose of the organization is to unite and represent marine sport anglers to work towards common goals. The JCAA website ([www.jcaa.org](http://www.jcaa.org)) also provides links for many NJ anglers associations.

### *Fishing assistance centers*

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

### *Other fishing related organizations*

The [NY/NJ Baykeeper](#) is working to protect and preserve the Hudson/Raritan Estuary for the benefit of both natural and human communities.

### **Physical**

Highlands is located within the shelter of Sandy Hook. Highlands is 6 miles from Belford, 8 miles from Red Bank, 41 miles from Newark, and 49 miles from New York City by car (MapQuest nd). The closest airport is Newark Liberty International Airport, about 38 miles from Highlands. The neighboring township of Middletown has a NJ Transit rail station with a commuter rail running to New York City, and several NJ Transit bus stops; nearby Red Bank also has a rail station (NJ Transit nd). Highlands is located at the eastern end of Route 36. [Sea Streak](#) operates a high speed ferry service to Manhattan more than a dozen times each day from Highlands; the trip takes less than an hour.

In general, the waterfront in Highlands is used for commercial purposes, including fishing, party boat rentals, a ferry dock, private marinas and more. The waterfront is also adjacent to and used by neighborhood groups and homeowners associations. Some waterfront access sites used for fishing include: Marine Place Bulkhead, Paradise Park, and Condominium Development Pier (McCay et al. 2005). Highlands lacks a location where fishermen can land and pack their catch; however, there is plenty of dock space for commercial vessels, which use one of seven marinas or private docks or slips. Some of Highlands charter boats leave from [Bahr's Landing Restaurant and Marina](#).

## **INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES<sup>6</sup>**

### **Commercial**

Highlands is home to an important clam depuration plant, the [JT White Plant](#), and [Certified Clams](#), its associated wholesale business. Certified Clams, in addition to selling clams from the depuration plant, also sells some clams, oysters, and occasionally lobsters from elsewhere. Certified Clams sells its Highlands clams to 480 A&P supermarkets throughout the east, as well as to Fulton Fish Market and a number of other markets out of state. In addition to the depuration plant, there is a clam wholesale business, a crab wholesaler, and two businesses that sell seafood both wholesale and retail, one of which sells primarily lobster, and the other which sells little locally-caught seafood (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003). One of these retail

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

businesses is the [Lusty Lobster](#), which sells primarily Maine lobsters and has two stores operating in Maine as well.

Commercial clamming for hard clams has seen resurgence in recent years with the construction of the depuration plant in 1995 combined with cleaner bay waters. In 2002, Highlands clammers harvested 20-25 million clams from the bay, worth an estimated \$4-5 million. There are also about 70-75 clammers who work the bay from Highlands. Few of these clammers actually live in Highlands; some come from as far as 100 miles away. Some of these individuals originally lived in Highlands but moved as the community became less affordable. Many of the clammers were formerly commercial fishermen targeting other species, who supplemented their activities with clamming, but today clamming is the primary commercial fishing activity in the area. Clamming occurs all year except for when the bay freezes. Potting for crabs and lobsters is another common fishery. There is nowhere for commercial fishers to land or pack finfish in Highlands, so many boats here land their catch in Belford at the co-op. There is also a depuration plant in neighboring Sea Bright, where fishermen may sell their catch (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

According to a NMFS Port Agent, state water landings appear to be mixed with the Federal landings data for Highlands.<sup>7</sup> The landings by species data (see Table 1) shows that lobster has traditionally been the most valuable of federally managed groups landed in Highlands, but there were no lobsters landed here in 2006. The level of home port fishing declined to zero in 2004, as did the level of fishing landed port after a steady decline in previous years. The numbers of home ported vessels also experienced a slight decline during this time period, from a high of 13 in 2000 to a low of 6 in 2006. The number of vessels whose owner's city was Highlands also declined over the same time period (see Table 2). It is important to note that because most of the fishing activity for Highlands is conducted in state waters, these landings values do not appear in federal fisheries data and so these numbers may not truly reflect the fishing activity in Highlands.

## Landings by Species

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

	<b>Average from 1997-2006</b>	<b>2006 only</b>
<b>Lobster</b>	89,772	0
<b>Other<sup>8</sup></b>	2,301	3,556
<b>Smallmesh Groundfish<sup>9</sup></b>	339	0
<b>Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass</b>	72	0
<b>Surf Clams, Ocean Quahog</b>	57	0

<sup>7</sup> Community Review Comments, Walter Makowski, NMFS Port Agent, August 8, 2007

<sup>8</sup> "Other" species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group.

<sup>9</sup> Smallmesh multi-Species: red hake, ocean pout, mixed hake, black whiting, silver hake (whiting)

## Vessels by Year<sup>10</sup>

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	9	6	148,417	120,627
1998	10	5	148,658	270,574
1999	12	5	201,834	332,358
2000	13	4	101,812	101,372
2001	11	5	66,736	48,671
2002	9	6	52,232	47,690
2003	10	4	2,550	567
2004	10	5	0	0
2005	8	5	398	0
2006	6	3	0	3,556

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

# Vessels (owner's city) = No. of permitted vessels with location as owner residence<sup>11</sup>

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

Recreational fishing is important to the Bayshore region. There are a number of bait and tackle shops and marinas located here (Jones 2004). Highlands is considered a good spot for recreational fishing because of its access to both the Atlantic Ocean and more sheltered waters. The community has one party boat, a boat rental service, at least six charter vessels, and eight marinas (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003). The [Bahrs Landing website](#) lists over a dozen charter boats for Highlands. Between 2001- 2005, there were 24 charter and party vessels making 4,296 total trips registered in logbook data by charter and party vessels in Highlands carrying a total of 91,245 anglers. Fishermen frequently fish from the bulkheads found around Highlands; surfcasting is also common in the area (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

In New Jersey, the charter/party fleet is the largest on east coast. Many vessels are over 120ft long and carry over 150 people.<sup>12</sup>

## Subsistence

“Because of the state department of health requirement that the clams from Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays be purified, the commercial clammers do not depend on their catches as a food source for themselves and their families. However, they occasionally pick up a depurated bag of clams free of charge from the wholesale warehouse, a courtesy that recalls the subsistence that

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Community Review Comments, Bruce Freeman, NJ Coast Anglers Association, October 2, 2007

clammers once combined with their commercial catch” (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003). Some fishermen also engage in a small eel fishery for subsistence (Larmarque and Bochenek 2003).

## **Future**

The Master Plan for Highlands outlines the need to build a municipal marina (Boro of Highlands nd). The Master Plan also discusses the community’s intentions to promote the waterfront as a place for “restaurant, retail and entertainment activities”, while also maintaining open access to the waterfront (Boro of Highlands nd). These plans could come into conflict with the commercial fishing operations in Highlands, although there is little to no fishing infrastructure here. On the other hand, this could greatly benefit the recreational fishing industry. The 2004 Master Plan looks to redevelop the Municipal Marina, operate water taxis to Sandy Hook, and reconstruct the Route 36 bridge (due to be completed in 2007) (McCay et al. 2005).

The proximity to the shore and the built-out condition of the Borough means that flooding is a concern. Although it may help to buffer strong wave action, some residents argue the bulkhead project at Marine Place has provided little relief to routine flooding in which water seeps up through storm drains, especially during high tide (McCay et al. 2005).

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