

Sisters

This community was profiled before analysis of data indicated that Sisters had a level of involvement in fishing below the criteria for inclusion in this document. For this reason, a full profile including graphics was not completed.

People and Place

Location

Sisters is located in Deschutes County in the high desert of Central Oregon at the base of the Three Sisters Mountains near the Metolious and Deschutes rivers. The community is 154 miles east of Portland. Sisters encompasses an area of 1.5 square miles. Its geographic coordinates are lat 44°38'13"N and long 124°03'08"W.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Sisters had a population of 959, a 41.2% increase from 1990. The gender composition was 50.5% female and 49.5% male. The median age was 38.8, compared to the national median of 35.3 years. Of the population 18 years of age and older, 87.5% had a high school education or higher, 17.4% had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 5.8% had a graduate or professional degree or higher; the national averages were 79.7%, 22.3%, and 7.8% respectively.

The majority of Sisters' racial composition was white (95.8%), followed by Native American or Alaska Native (1.6%), people who identified with some other race (1.4%), people who identified with two or more races (0.8%), and Asian (0.4%). Ethnicity data indicate 4.6% identified as Hispanic, and 1.8% were foreign-born. The nonprofit organization Economic Development for Central Oregon reported an additional 9,000 people live within a 5-mile radius of Sisters.¹

History

The Sisters area was first used as a crossroads for Native Americans traveling from the Willamette Valley. Three different societies, who would later make up the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, lived along the Columbia River, the Cascade Mountains, and parts of southern Oregon before European settlers arrived. The Wasco bands were the farthest east Chinook-speaking Indians that lived on the Columbia River and were primarily fishermen. They traded bread, salmon meal, and bear grass for other goods from neighboring tribes, such as the Clackamas and the Warm Springs. The Warm Springs band spoke Sahaptin and lived along the Columbia's tributaries. These bands moved between

winter and summer villages, depending on salmon, other game, and roots and berries. Members of both the Wasco and the Warm Springs bands built elaborate scaffolding over waterfalls to harvest fish using long-handled dip nets. The Paiute were much different from the other two bands, living on the high-plains of southeastern Oregon and speaking a Shoshone dialect. The band migrated far for game and did not rely on fish for their diet. Contact between the Paiute and the Wasco and Warm Springs bands was infrequent and sometimes erupted in conflict.²

Fur trappers and explorers of the Hudson's Bay Company arrived around 1810 and followed Indian trails that led toward Warm Springs and through Cascade Mountain passes to the east and the Columbia River.^{3, 4} Most early pioneers following the Oregon Trail avoided Central Oregon due to the natural barrier created by the Cascade Mountains.⁵ However, by the 1850s nearly 12,000 settlers were moving through Wasco and Warm Springs territories each year. In 1855 Joel Palmer, Indian superintendent, negotiated a treaty with the Warm Springs and Wasco tribes in which they gave up 10 million acres of land in exchange for exclusive use of the Warm Springs Reservation. In addition, the tribes kept their rights to harvest fish, game, and other foods in their usual and accustomed places, even those that were off the reservation. Thirty-eight Paiutes were moved to the Warm Springs Reservation from the Yakama Reservation in 1879 and more eventually followed.

In 1937 the three tribes organized the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. In 1938 they formally accepted a corporate charter from the federal government for their business enterprises.⁶ The tribes continue to support the surrounding areas with a number of businesses that provide employment and commerce for local residents of Sisters and other communities, as well as participating in local cultural events and festivals. Many of the foods utilized in the past and methods used to harvest these foods are still an important part of contemporary Indian life.

In 1859 the first route from the Willamette Valley was discovered and soon new routes were developed to gold mines in eastern Oregon and Idaho. In 1865-66 volunteers from Polk County established Camp Polk, a military base built along Squaw Creek to protect settlers and miners from Indian attacks. The attacks never happened and the camp was abandoned.⁷ Samuel M. Hindman homesteaded the site in 1870 and opened a post office and store. The post office closed in 1888 and relocated to the John Smith General Store. Sisters was chosen as the name for the new town, in honor of Faith,

Hope, and Charity, the Three Sister Mountains. The community was officially platted in 1901.^{8,9}

Community members took advantage of the town's location at the intersection of the Santiam and McKenzie roads. For the next 50 years, Sisters was a supply stop for travelers and sheepmen, as well as for the growing lumber and agriculture industries. In 1923–24 the entire town burned to the ground in two major fires. Despite economic hardships, the residents rebuilt the community. Sisters incorporated in 1946. The last mill closed in 1963 when lumber production fell and the population declined.

In 1969 Brooks Resources Corporation began development on the Black Butte Ranch resort and residential area. The developers offered money to businesses in Sisters to build 1880s western-style storefronts and signs.¹⁰ Sisters evolved and reemerged as a tourist town that would eventually become known as the Gateway to the Cascades. The town economy stabilized to become a resort town and service center to Black Butte Ranch and other residential areas. Today the community is known for unique shops, galleries, and eating establishments as well as its proximity to the Metolius and Deschutes rivers, two of the most popular fly fishing streams in the northwest.^{11,12}

Tourists visit Sisters year-round for numerous festivals and events. The Annual Metolius Bamboo Rod and Fly Fishing Fair is held during the summer and provides opportunities to learn about bamboo fly rods, how to tie flies, and to experience the work of local Northwest artisans. The Annual Sisters Western and Native American Arts Festival also takes place during the summer months. Participants can experience what life was like for Native Americans and pioneers in the past, as well as demonstrations of contemporary local native culture.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 62.7% of Sisters' potential labor force 16 years of age and older were employed, 3.8% were unemployed, and the unemployment rate was 5.7% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). In addition, 33.5% were not in the labor force. The top employment sectors were retail trade (18.8%), government (13.9%), accommodation and food services (13.2%), manufacturing (12.3%), and educational, health, and social services (12.3%). Natural resource jobs including agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting employed 4.5%, but this percentage may be artificially low because many fishermen are self-employed and are underrepresented in these data.

The major industries in Sisters are tourism, agriculture, and timber.¹³ The five largest employers are St. Charles Medical Center, Black Butte Ranch, Bank of the Cascades, Multnomah Publishers, and Ray's Food Place.¹⁴ According to Economic Development for Central Oregon, Sisters has one of the highest per capita retail spending of any community in Oregon.¹⁵

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the per capita income of Sisters in 1999 was \$17,847 and the median household income was \$35,000. In 1999 10.4% lived below poverty level. Of Sisters' 482 housing units in 2000, 82.4% were occupied and 17.6% were vacant. Of the occupied units, 58.4% were by owner and 41.6% were by renter.

Governance

Sisters is incorporated and operates under a council-manager charter. Oregon has no general sales tax but levies a 1% overnight lodging tax that funds the Oregon Tourism Commission. See the Governance subsection (page 43) in the Overview section for a more detailed discussion of taxes affecting fishermen and processors in Oregon.

The closest National Marine Fisheries Service office is a research station in Newport, 158 miles west of Sisters. The community is near the High Desert Region office of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in Bend (22 miles) and is 154 miles from the nearest U.S. Coast Guard Unit and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office, both in Portland. Meetings of the Pacific Fishery Management and North Pacific Fishery Management councils are also held in Portland.

Facilities

Sisters is accessible by land and air. Major highways that intersect the community are U.S. Highway 20 and Oregon Highway 126. The closest bus service is in Bend. The local Sisters Eagle Airport serves small planes. The community is located approximately 20 miles from Roberts Field at the Redmond Municipal Airport and 167 miles from Portland International Airport.

Local schools include one elementary school, one middle school, and two high schools; one of the high schools is an alternative school. The Deschutes County Sheriff's Department administers local law enforcement. The Central Electric Cooperative supplies electricity to area residents. The City of Sisters oversees the water supply and the sewer system, and is currently developing a municipal sewer system to enable the community to expand and develop.¹⁶ The closest health care facility, St. Charles Medical Center, is 20 miles away in Bend. Sisters' lodging accommodations include the Black Butte

Ranch, bed and breakfasts, condominiums, hotels and motels, campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks, and vacation rentals.

Wizard Falls Fish Hatchery is located nearby on the Metolius River. The hatchery raises close to 3 million fish, including rainbow, brook, and brown trout, kokanee (landlocked sockeye salmon), and Atlantic salmon.¹⁷

Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

According to recorded data, Sisters residents did not participate in West Coast fisheries in 2000.

Sportfishing

Sisters had at least four outfitter guide businesses in 2003. Internet fishing guide sources show at least one sportfishing business currently operating in the community.¹⁸ At present, Sisters has six sportfishing license vendors. In 2000 agents sold 2,242 licenses at a value of \$40,389.

Subsistence

Many local community members engage in subsistence fishing. Both nontribal and tribal fishermen, including members of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, utilize stream resources for subsistence means from the areas within and surrounding Sisters. Specific information on subsistence fishing in Sisters is not discussed in detail in this community profile due to the lack of available data.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

In 2000 three community members held registered federal permits. The halibut and sablefish individual fishing quota shares for Sisters' residents were 2,121,042 and 1,185,556 respectively. Three Sisters community members held crewmember licenses for North Pacific fisheries.

Sportfishing

Sisters residents purchased 42 Alaska sportfishing licenses in 2000.

Notes

1. Economic Development for Central Oregon. 2003. Communities: Sisters. Online at <http://www.edforco.org/communities/sisters/sisters.html> [accessed 29 January 2007].

2. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. 2004. Chronology. Online at http://www.warmsprings.com/Warmsprings/Tribal_Community/History__Culture/ [accessed 29 January 2007].

3. Informat Communications. 1995. Sisters history. Online at <http://www.informat.com/places/sisters/history.html> [accessed 29 January 2007].

4. R. Hatton. No date. A brief history of Sisters. Online at <http://www.sisterschamber.com/Sisters-Community/History-of-Sisters/default.aspx> [accessed 29 January 2007].

5. See note 3.

6. See note 2.

7. See note 3.

8. See note 1.

9. See note 4.

10. See note 3.

11. See note 4.

12. Sisters Chamber of Commerce. No date. Recreation in Sisters: Fly fishing. Online at <http://www.sisterschamber.com/Sisters-Community/History-of-Sisters/default.aspx> [accessed 29 January 2007].

13. Oregon Economic & Community Development Department. 2004. Sisters community profile. Online at <http://info.econ.state.or.us:591/FMPro?-db=Community.fp4&-Format=forms.htm&-lay=webpage&-op=eq&sort%20name=Sisters&-script=hit%20count&-Find> [accessed 29 January 2007].

14. Sisters Oregon Guide. 2004. Facts & figures. Online at <http://www.sistersoregonguide.com/recreation.htm> [accessed 29 January 2007].

15. See note 1.

16. See note 1.

17. Wizard Falls fish hatchery. No Date. Online at <http://www.sistersoregonguide.com/sisters-must-see.html> [accessed 29 January 2007].

18. Sportfishing businesses determined via internet search. Online at <http://www.fishingnetwork.com> [accessed September 2004].