

SORRENTO, ME¹

Community Profile²

PEOPLE AND PLACES

Regional orientation

The town of Sorrento, Maine (44.47°N, 68.18°W) is located in Hancock County, jutting out into Frenchman's Bay on Waukeag Neck. This small town is just 4.0 square miles in area (State of Maine 2004), making it the smallest town in Hancock County that is not an island (Ellsworth American 2002).



Map 1. Location of Sorrento, ME (US Census Bureau 2002)

Historical/Background

Sorrento was originally a part of the neighboring town Sullivan, and was first settled by Europeans in 1762 (State of Maine 2004). Sullivan was originally called Waukeag by Native Americans, a name which means “a horseback in a place where the tide runs out very strong,” referring to a tidal stream that runs from Sullivan Harbor (SSHS 2005). Sullivan was an important ship-building community, with a number of ships built in Sullivan Harbor, across from what is now Sorrento (Ellsworth American 2002a). Sorrento was incorporated as a town in 1895, splitting off from Sullivan. The town was created by two men, one from Portsmouth, NH and one from Boston, who sought to create a summer resort colony here that would rival Bar Harbor. They laid out streets and lots, built a wharf for steamboats, as well as tennis courts and a library. The Hotel Sorrento, built in 1888, had 150 rooms, and was 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.”

center of this busy summer colony. The hotel burned down in 1906, putting an end to an era in Sorrento (Ellsworth American 2002).

Sorrento Harbor is today surrounded by Victorian homes that were at one time the summer retreats of industrialists, writers, and artists (MFVBBA 1999). Today the harbor is still home to many fishing boats (MFVBBA 1999). The town has two nature preserves maintained by the Nature Conservancy, Preble Island and Dram Island, which are home to nesting eagles and osprey (State of Maine 2004). Sorrento has no schools or libraries; schoolchildren travel to Sullivan to attend school, and the town shares the two libraries in Sullivan (Ellsworth American 2002). The town likes to refer to itself as “the best-kept secret on the Maine coast” as it was referred to by Down East magazine (Ellsworth American 2002).

Demographics³

According to Census 2000 data⁴, Sorrento had a total population of 290, down 2.0% from the reported population of 296 in 1990 (US Census Bureau 1990). Of this 2000 total, 49.0% were males and 51.0% were females. The median age was 46.7 years and 79.0% of the population was 21 years or older while 26.2% was 62 or older.

Sorrento’s age structure (see Figure 1) shows a relatively aging population; the highest percentage of the population is between 40-49 years, with much of the population also within 50-59 and 60-69 age brackets. As is seen in many small towns, there is a sharp decline in the population for the 20-29 age category, as young people leave town for college and in search of employment. But unlike in many other towns, this trend seems to continue through the 30-39 age category.

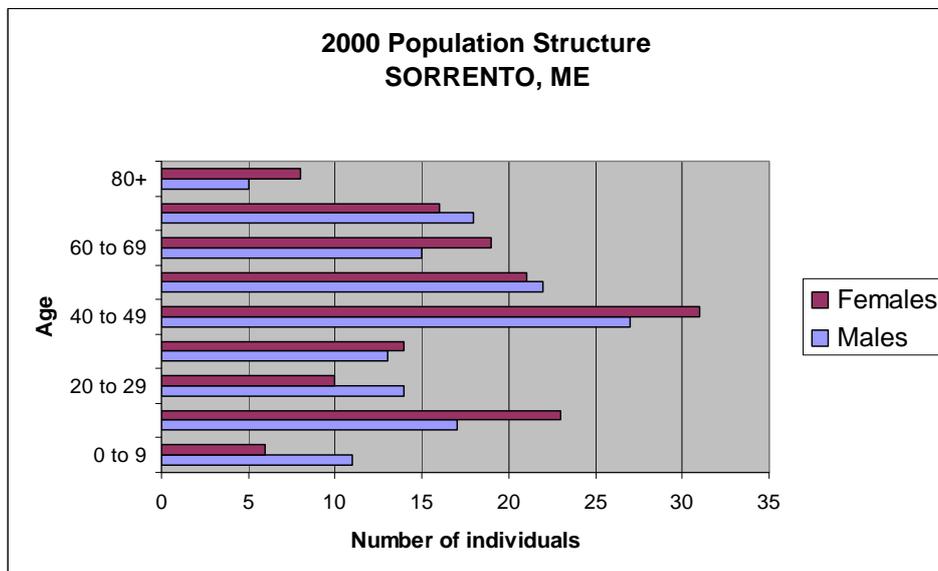


Figure 1. Sorrento’s population structure by sex in 2000

The majority of the population was white (96.2%), with no residents black or African American, none Asian, 2.4% Native American, and 0.3% Pacific Islander or Hawaiian (see

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.

⁴ 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 Sorrento town, Hancock County, ME (accessed July 25, 2007)

Figure 2). Only 0.7% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino (see Figure). Residents linked their backgrounds to a number of different ancestries including: English (37.7%), Irish (19.7%), and German (8.8%). With regard to region of birth, 56.0% were born in Maine, 41.5% were born in a different state and 1.1% were born outside of the U.S. All Sorrento residents were U.S. citizens.

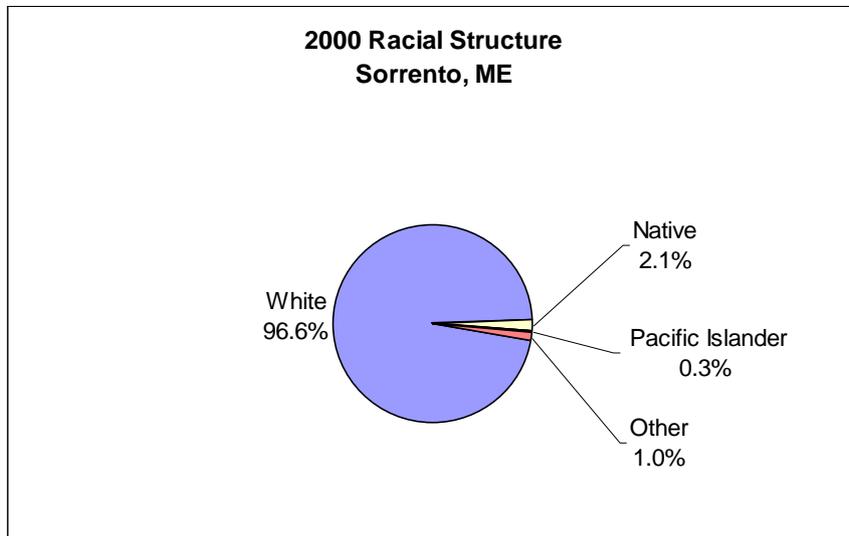


Figure 2. Racial Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

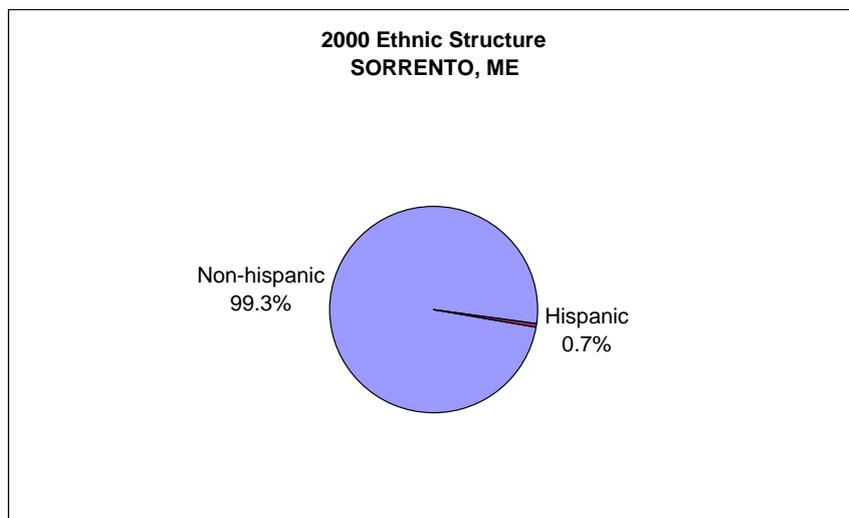


Figure 3. Ethnic Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

For 99.3% of the population, only English was spoken in the home, leaving 0.7% in homes where a language other than English was spoken. None of the population spoke English less than “very well” according to the 2000 Census.

Of the population 25 years and over, 95.2% were high school graduates or higher and 39.3% had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Again of the population 25 years and over, 1.7% did not reach ninth grade, 3.1% attended some high school but did not graduate, 30.1% completed high school, 19.2% had some college with no degree, 6.6% received an associate’s degree, 13.5% earned a bachelor’s degree, and 25.8% received 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 Hancock County was Catholic with 10 congregations and 6,292 adherents. Other prominent congregations in the county were the United Church of Christ (19 with 1,957 adherents), and American Baptist Churches of USA (17 with 1,774 adherents). The total number of adherents to any religion was up 25.2% from 1990 (ARDA 2000). Sorrento has one United Methodist church and one Episcopal Church (Ellsworth America 2002).

Issues/Processes

As cultivated mussels from Canada have been introduced to markets, fishermen, who traditionally harvested mussels by dragging for them, have begun to see much of the market for wild mussels disappear. As a result, some Sorrento fishermen, where mussels are one of the most valuable species, have switched to agriculture, to compete in the market and receive a higher price for the mussels (Porter 2002).

In 2006, the State of Maine passed the Working Waterfront Tax Law, to address the problem of working waterfront property being heavily taxed based on its projected market value. The goal of this tax is “to encourage the preservation of working waterfront land and to prevent the conversion of working waterfront land to other uses as the result of economic pressures caused by the assessment of that land for purposes of property taxation.” The law requires the tax assessor to value the property based on what it is worth as working waterfront land, rather than what its market value would be if it were sold and converted to residential or other uses (State of Maine 2005).

Cultural attributes

Lobster boat races are a popular event in Sorrento (SACC 2008), held in nearby Winter Harbor as part of the town’s annual lobster festival. Citizens of Sorrento and Sullivan get together every year to host the annual Sullivan Daze festival to celebrate community pride in these two towns (SACC 2008).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Current Economy

Sorrento Lobster and Fish has a core group of three employees, expanding to 7-8 in the summer months that work grading, packing, and shipping lobsters.⁵ The Town Clerk reports that many residents work outside of the town. Within the town, some residents work in light construction while a few work at Power Grips, a company that manufactures weight-lifting gloves. She also noted that a number of residents are employed at Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor.⁶

Some residents of Sorrento may work in neighboring Gouldsboro or Ellsworth. The most significant employers in the Gouldsboro area are: the Eleanor Widener Dixon Memorial Hospital; Elscott Corporation (electrical machinery); Flanders Bay School District; Port Clyde Foods/Stinson Canning (seafood processing); Schoodic Community School District; and Sullivan School Superintendent. The largest employers in Ellsworth are: Allen’s Blueberry Freezer; Inc. (blueberry and cranberry growing and processing); Shop N’ Save; Hancock Foods, Inc. (fruit and vegetable processing); Maine Coast Memorial Hospital; and the Maine Transportation Department (EACC 2005).

⁵ Personal Communication, Sorrento Lobster and Fish, 244 Ocean Ave, Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

⁶ Personal Communication, Ester Clement, Sorrento Town Clerk, Sorrento Town Hall, 79 Pomola Ave. Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

According to the U.S. Census 2000⁷, 59.0% (144 individuals) of the total population 16 years of age and over were in the labor force (Figure 4), of which 3.3% were unemployed, 1.6% were in the Armed Forces, and 54.1% were employed.

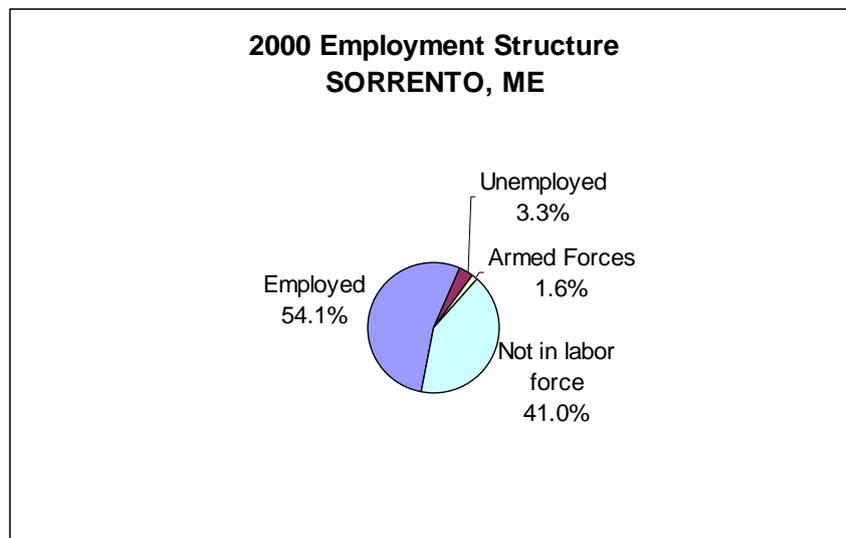


Figure 4. Employment Structure in 2000 (US Census Bureau 2000)

According to Census 2000 data, jobs in the census grouping which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining accounted for 6 positions or 4.5% of all jobs. Self employed workers, a category where fishermen might be found, accounted for 44 positions or 33.3% of jobs. Educational, health, and social services (22.0%), professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services (15.2%), and retail trade (12.1%) were the primary industries.

Median household income in Sorrento was \$42,125 (up 112.8% from \$19,792 in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and median per capita income was \$23,791. For full-time year round workers, females made approximately 13.8% more per year than males.

The average family in Sorrento consisted of 2.59 persons. With respect to poverty, 3.4% of families (down from 4.8% in 1990 [US Census Bureau 1990]) and 5.7% of individuals earned 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 2000a). In 2000, 34.7% of all families (of any size) earned less than \$35,000 per year.

In 2000, Sorrento had a total of 287 housing units of which 45.4% were occupied and 90.6% were detached one unit homes. More than one-third (36.9%) of these homes were built before 1940. Mobile homes accounted for 7.0% of the total housing units; 90.6% of detached units had between 2 and 9 rooms. In 2000, the median cost for a home in this area was \$128,100. Of vacant housing units, 51.8% were used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Of occupied units, 17.2% were renter occupied.

Government

Sorrento has a three-member Board of Selectmen, and a Municipal Clerk (State of Maine 2004).

⁷ 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.

Fishery involvement in government

Sorrento has a Harbor Committee that addresses issues dealing with the harbor including the moorings and the Town Dock, as well as a harbormaster.

Institutional

Fishing associations

The fishing associations that serve Sorrento fishermen are the Downeast Lobstermen's Association located in Deer Isle, Maine, and the [Maine Lobstermen's Association](#) (MLA). The MLA was founded in 1954, and works to protect the lobster resource and the lobstermen's way of life. The association was founded by lobstermen with a goal of empowering Maine's lobster industry by representing lobstermen with a united front. The MLA is the largest commercial fishing industry group on the east coast, and represents the interests of 1200 lobstermen.

Fishing assistance centers

The Working Waterfront Coalition is a statewide collaboration of various industry associations, non-profits, and government agencies with the goal to support Maine's working waterfronts. The [Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program](#), administered by the Department of Marine Resources, provides money to applicants such as municipalities, fishing co-ops, private commercial fisheries businesses and more, ranging from \$7,000 to \$475,000. The intention of the program is to preserve commercial fisheries working waterfronts and to help secure property for these businesses. As of December 2007, the \$2 million pilot program has reportedly supported over 400 jobs, 194 boats, and assured access to clam flats, parking, wharfage and fisheries in six towns (Maine DMR 2005). Voters [approved an additional \\$3 million](#) to continue the program in 2007.

Other fishing related organizations

The [Maine Fishermen's Forum](#) was founded in 1976, and its goal is to provide continuous opportunities to educate the public and the fishing industry about marine resource issues and fisheries, as well as to provide a platform for discussion and decision making. The Forum also holds an annual three day event which focuses awareness on issues that affect the commercial fishing industry.

Physical

Sorrento is located on Waukeag Neck, a peninsula jutting out into Frenchman's Bay, and is northeast of Mount Desert Island. U.S. Route 1 passes north of Sorrento, providing access to much of the Maine coast in both directions, but only one road, Route 185, passes in and out of Sorrento, isolating the town to some extent (Ellsworth American 2002). Hancock County - Bar Harbor Airport is located halfway between Ellsworth and Bar Harbor, and it is approximately 20 miles from Sorrento. A regional service is provided between this airport and Logan Airport in Boston, Massachusetts. The international airports of Portland and Bangor are respectively 171 and 43 miles from Sorrento. Ellsworth, the nearest large town, is 16.5 miles away.

There are two harbor areas in Sorrento; Sorrento Harbor and the Lower and Eastern Harbors. Fishing and lobstering vessels are moored or docked in both harbors. The municipal Town Dock is located in Sorrento Harbor; both commercial fishing vessels and recreational boats tie up here.⁸ Sorrento Lobster and Fish is a lobster wholesaler in town;

⁸ Personal Communication, Ester Clement, Sorrento Town Clerk, Sorrento Town Hall, 79 Pomola Ave. Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

they have a dock where Sorrento’s lobstermen unload their catch, and bait is provided here. They also purchase lobsters from some other docks in the region for wholesale distribution.⁹

INVOLVEMENT IN NORTHEAST FISHERIES¹⁰

Commercial

Lobster is by far the most significant fishery in Sorrento. Sorrento Lobster and Fish is a packing and wholesale facility that buys from about 15 independent lobstermen in Sorrento; this is the only loading dock in town, so probably all of the lobstermen sell their catch here.¹¹ Some fishermen from outside of Sorrento keep their vessels in the harbor. There are a few draggers that work the bay in the winter for mussels and scallops that are sometimes found in Sorrento.¹² Additionally, a few fishermen in Sorrento grow mussels and scallops in submerged aquaculture facilities off the coast (Porter 2004).

The vast majority of landings in Sorrento were lobster (see Table 1); landings increased almost every year from 1997-2006. The level of home port fishing is at zero for most years, and the number of vessels home ported here (see Table 2) is inconsistent with information gained from interviews; the Town Clerk believed there were at least 10 active fishermen in the town, and Sorrento Lobster and Fish indicated they purchased from 15 Sorrento vessels.¹³ Possibly the fishermen in Sorrento list their home port as elsewhere, or this information is not being properly reported.

Landings by Species

Table 1. Rank Value of Landings for Federally Managed Groups

Species	Rank Value of Average Landings from 1997-2006
Lobster	1
Other ¹⁴	2
Herring	3

(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.)

⁹ Personal Communication, Sorrento Lobster and Fish, 244 Ocean Ave, Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Personal Communication, Sorrento Lobster and Fish, 244 Ocean Ave, Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

¹² Personal Communication, Ester Clement, Sorrento Town Clerk, Sorrento Town Hall, 79 Pomola Ave. Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

¹³ Personal Communication, Ester Clement, Sorrento Town Clerk, Sorrento Town Hall, 79 Pomola Ave. Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

¹⁴ “Other” species includes any species not accounted for in a federally managed group

Vessels by Year¹⁵

Table 2. Federal Vessel Permits Between 1997-2006

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

(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)

Recreational

Information on recreational fishing in Sorrento is unavailable through secondary data collection.

Subsistence

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

FUTURE

Residents report that, unlike other communities in the area, not much development is occurring in Sorrento, in part because much of the property in the town belongs to a few families with deep roots here (Ellsworth American 2002). However, the waterfront area still faces development pressures like everywhere else along the coast.¹⁷

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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.

¹⁷ Personal Communication, Ester Clement, Sorrento Town Clerk, Sorrento Town Hall, 79 Pomola Ave. Sorrento, ME 04677, 8/26/05

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