

## Community Profile

### Highlands, New Jersey

By Johnelle Lamarque

#### I. General Description of Highlands:

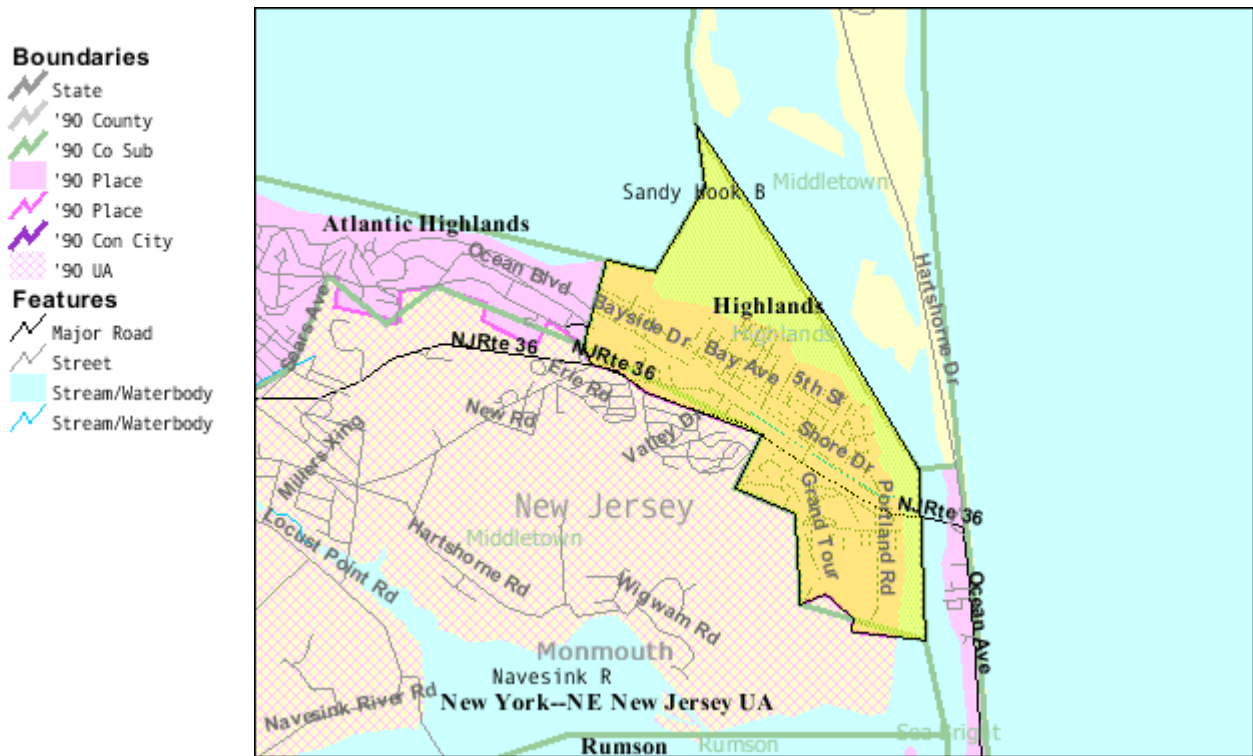
Highlands, New Jersey, sits where the fast-moving waters of the Shrewsbury and Navesink Rivers converge and spill into the Sandy Hook Bay. These waters separate Highlands from a strip of sandy beach, now Sandy Hook Gateway National Park, which protects the .07-square mile borough from pounding Atlantic Ocean waves. The borough's dense residential and commercial district covers flood-prone bayside blocks that sweep up into coastal bluffs dotted by more expensive residences. State Highway 36 segments the wealthier highlands from the low-lying bayside section, which has traditionally been the locus of commercial and recreational fishing. The borough is the site of an important clam depuration plant and several wholesale seafood businesses, marinas (most with both commercial and recreational boats), charter boats, as well as commuter ferry services that offer 40-minute trips to and from Manhattan. An annual festival (The Clam Fest) recalls the town's long tradition of commercial clamming, although there was once much diversity in commercial fish harvesting and more party boat activity in the borough. While Highlands barely registers in National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) permit lists and landings data these days, examination of the borough's fisheries provides important insights into how recreational, for-hire and commercial fisheries negotiate state and federal waters and regulations, particularly amid increasing gentrification pressures.

Highlands lies at the eastern edge of the New Jersey Bayshore where it meets the state's beach-lined Atlantic Coast. Highlands borough lies on the northern coast of Monmouth County, just north of Middletown Township, from which it seceded in 1900. Historically, the borough's economy revolved around summer tourism and commercial fishing, particularly the harvesting of soft clams (*Mya arenaria*) for which the borough was renowned. From the 1800s to about the 1970s, the primary occupation of most bayside residents was commercial fishing and in particular commercial clamming. In recent years, the hard clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) industry has become the focus of commercial fishing in Highlands, resurrecting commercial clamming after decades of closures largely due to polluted waters. Today, the waters are cleaner than they have been in decades and the borough's economic fortunes seem to be improving. A clam depuration plant, opened in 1995, purifies millions of dollars worth of the locally caught shellfish and employs about 100 people as harvesters, laborers and office staff. A fast-speed ferry service launches from three different docks in Highlands and has increased the borough's appeal to a professional class of New Jersey residents who commute daily to New York City.

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Highlands borough, New Jersey  
 U.S. Census Map, American Fact Finder



4 miles across

*Borough Demographics*

The population of the borough increased more than five percent in the decade from 1990 to a total of 5,097 residents in the year 2000. Highlands is beginning to become more of a commuter suburb than a commercial fishing town or a summer resort, as middle-income summer residents transform their bungalows for year-round living and are joined by newcomers to the many condominium developments and renovated homes. Much of Highlands, particularly the bayside area and locus for fishing and summer tourism has traditionally been an area with lower incomes and education levels than other parts of Monmouth County. Highlands has also traditionally been home to very few racial or ethnic minorities, with 95 percent of the 2000 population calling itself white. Minority populations in Highlands have increased but still remain small. Per capita income is rising but remains below the per capita for Monmouth County. Despite the increase in per capita income, there has been a slight increase also in the real numbers and in the percentage of the population living in poverty. Monmouth County poverty levels also increased but remained lower than those in Highlands. Education levels are also below the larger county levels, while poverty levels and unemployment are higher.

	Highlands 1990	2000	Monmouth County 1990	2000
Per capita income	\$19,065	\$29,369		\$31,149
Poverty level	7.5 %	12 %	5%	6%
Unemployment		4%		2%
High School Graduates		35%		27.5%
College Graduates		17%		22%
White	98%	95%		87%
African American	>1%	1.5%		8%
Hispanic	2.25%	4%		6%

The borough's mayor and council form of government provides much of its own services and tax collection. The Highlands Business Partnership is a non-governmental agency that supplements the functions of the local planning and zoning boards and borough council through economic development strategies, including collecting mandatory fees from borough businesses for group advertising and other marketing efforts. The U.S. Census identifies the borough as a densely populated urban area, but that description belies the focus both long-time and newer residents train on the natural resources of the bay, hillside parks, ocean and the many bayside and ocean beaches. Still, the tightly packed and modest housing of the low-lying section of town reveal the town's blue-collar roots. Once known for its many bars and barroom brawls, the borough is gentrifying. With New York's Verazzano Bridge in background, ferry passengers bundled against the wind smoke cigarettes outside of a warm cabin as they commute to their Wall Street jobs and occasionally notice clambers at work on the bay.

## II. Dependency and Engagement in the Fisheries

### A. Commercial Fishing

#### History and Current Description

Highlands has a long history of multi-species and multi-gear commercial fishing with particular emphasis on harvesting inshore clams. Local baymen with relatively small capital investments took advantage of the area's environmental diversity: nearby ocean depths and the shallow waters of the bays, rivers and tidal flats. Although clamming is the historic and present-day mainstay of the fishing community, commercial fishing was more diverse from the 1960s through 1980s and included the use of trawls, pound nets, gillnets and lobster pots. With the introduction of stricter regulations, lower quotas and diminished stocks, the numbers of people engaged in the variety of fisheries has declined. Now only a handful of people participate in more than one fishery in Highlands, doing so typically from small boats between 15 and 40 feet long. The small boats of Highland's commercial fishing community are vulnerable to rough weather.

While several baymen engage two or three different fisheries, only one continues a wide variety of harvesting, using clam rakes, crab dredges, gillnets, fyke nets and lobster pots at different times of the year. He continues this wide range of fishing learned from his father for the income but particularly to keep his licenses for those fisheries. Another few boats target lobster, mostly one family, which also pots and dredges for crabs and rakes for hard clams. Another long-time

commercial fishing family pots for blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) and specializes in shedding them to sell as soft crabs.

Clams have been the main fishery in town even before Highlands' incorporation. The following quote from a 1889 guidebook describes the pervasive culture of clamming in Parkertown, as part of Highland's bayside section was once known: "The soul of this original community is wrapped up in clams. They are to it what the whales once were to Nantucket. Parkertown is clamming, shelling, stringing or canning clams; devouring them, or dreaming of one or another of these acts" (cited in Leonard 1923). The reputation of Highlands as a clamming community grew from a history of harvesting, processing and serving in restaurants the soft clams or "pissers" churned up from bottoms of the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays. However, from the 1920s and particularly following 1942, pollution began washing into the bay from the urbanizing areas of New York City and northern New Jersey and led to an infectious Hepatitis outbreak in 1961 that closed the bays to all kinds of clamming except for brief periods and particular locations in the 1960s and 1970s.

The 1961 outbreak resulted in the loss of 3,000 jobs in the area and \$8.5 million in the local economy, according to a 1976 EPA report cited by Caruso 1982. Depuration plants that purified hard and soft clams opened and closed throughout the 1980s and 1990s and a relay system established in the 1980s also opened the bays sporadically for a few clammers through those decades (McKenzie 1992). One report notes that the soft clam depuration plants in town restored the soft clam industry to one half of its previous capacity, putting some clammers back to work, while others found different jobs, usually in the building trades (Caruso 1982). Informants said that some baymen were able to piece together a livelihood, others languished and still others moved to southern New Jersey to work in open cleaner waters.

Lobsters were also an important fishery in Highlands. In 1970, there were 30 lobstermen working out of Highlands, according to informants. There have been fewer and fewer since 1975. Now there are only three residents who lobster from three boats with out of town, typically Hispanic crew. A 1982 study found 50 soft clammers with 30 boats and 30 lobstermen with 9 boats operating in Highlands, of the total 117 full-time, part-time, and seasonal fishers and 25 dock and plant workers employed in town (Caruso 1982). The 48 commercial boats identified in the 1982 study have actually increased to about 75, nearly all for hard clamming. All four of the town's lobster pounds that were present in 1980 are gone as are the two soft clam depuration plants, replaced years later by a hard clam depuration plant in 1995, the J.T. White Clam Depuration Plant.

Although the Highlands depuration plant opened in 1995 and re-introduced commercial clamming to this borough, the technology for actually harvesting seafood has changed very little in the past decade. Soft clams were harvested in a slightly different manner that involved churning the bottom with long hoes (MacKenzie 1992). The practice of treading for clams, using bare feet to locate and pull up toes full of clams, has all but disappeared in this area. Now, hard clammers pull their rakes up with a motorized pulley, and use engines or outboards get to the clam beds, but are restricted by the state from using any motorized device to actually harvest the shellfish. Sometimes clammers use a sail to catch the wind or drop it into the water to help harness the water current as they churn the bay floor with their clam rakes. Because of the state

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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 clammers once combined with their commercial catch.

About 70-75 clammers converge in Highlands six mornings a week all year long to pick up their allotted baskets from the depuration plant located on the town's waterfront and to motor their 15-25 foot boats to dig clams with long rakes that reach the bay bottom. The back-breaking work usually begins before 7 a.m. and ends by 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. with the return of full baskets to a wooden dock behind the borough's clam depuration plant. The amount of work is limited by plant capacity and the equal distribution of baskets among local clammers. Years ago fewer clammers were able to harvest more clams per person. Currently, for a few clammers, the work supplements pensions from past careers or other forms of fishing accomplished either in the later afternoon or at other times of year. The commercial fishermen and clammers in Highlands tend to captain their own small boats, with only an occasional mate.

Another cluster of commercial boats dock in the marina in neighboring Sea Bright, a small borough on a strip of land on the Atlantic Ocean and across the Shrewsbury River from Highlands. Those boats sell their catch to the other smaller clam depuration plant there. This situation is viewed by most Highlands fishermen as less desirable than being part of the J.T. White and Certified Clam operation because the clammers get more money per clam through their Association operations than through the Sea Bright plant's vertically integrated operation. The Sea Bright operation buys seafood from fishermen and clammers who are excluded from the Belford Co-op and the J.T. White Plant. The Sea Bright depuration plant has half the capacity of the J.T. White plant in Highlands and is owned and operated by one of the former managers of the J.T. White plant.

In addition to the (both commercial and recreational) fishing opportunities and auxiliary operations in town, there are many related businesses including wholesale and retail seafood businesses, seafood restaurants, a couple of small bait and tackle shops and fuel docks. Otherwise, raking, depurating and selling hard clams are the central feature of commercial fishing in Highlands.

As the locus of commercial clamming on the New Jersey Bayshore, Highlands maintains a stake in the fortunes of a wide variety of commercial fishers. Many of the clammers working today out of Highlands started in some other kind of commercial fishing, or merely supplemented other fishing activities with commercial clamming. Now, however, clamming is the main occupation for almost all of the commercial fishermen in Highlands as well as those who travel into town each day. A local clammer who grew up hard clamming in Long Island with his grandfather looked out at the other men digging their long rakes into the bay floor one calm sunny morning in May 2003 and called them displaced fishermen. By some counts, a quarter of the current clammers working in Highlands have shifted from other fisheries, particularly lobstermen and draggers, to sole dependency on clamming. Many have also come from other occupations. Among the Highlands clammers are a former diesel mechanic, a stockbroker, a chicken feed salesman and a mattress salesman, among others. It seems that this form of small-scale

commercial fishing (requiring low-capital investment) is an important alternative for potentially unemployed or under-employed people.

Highlands clammers pulled in between 20 million to 25 million clams from the bay in 2002 for a gross of \$4 million to \$5 million, according to a manager of the only wholesale operation in town, Certified Clam. Numbers for wild harvest clams in open waters are not reliable, according to state officials. This is because numbers gathered by the state wildlife and fisheries department are not geographically specified, and there is no mandatory harvest statistics for open water hard clam landings so available data is extremely low. Most clammers in Highlands deperate rather than harvest in open waters. Statewide, there were 1,173 hard clammers licensed in New Jersey in FY 2002, according to Division of Fish and Wildlife officials. The bayshore clammers working in the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bay had relay or deperation permits. Some held both.

The J.T. White Clam Depuration Plant has a 240 bushel capacity to purify clams and operates six days a week. The purification process takes three days. While the waters of the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays and associated rivers are much cleaner now than they were in the 1970s and 1980s, most locations in the bays and rivers remain unsafe for direct harvest and human consumption of shellfish. The purification process (or deperation) works by exposing bay water to ultraviolet rays and then keeping the clams in this cleaned water so they can purge themselves of biological contaminates. An added benefit of this process is that the clams also purge most of the sand that naturally filters through them from the bay floor. Highlands clams are now advertised as “sand-free”.

The plant usually works at full capacity, but did not in 2003, an exceptionally difficult year because of closures due to a harsh winter and two large sewer spills. In the winter of 2003, the bay and rivers froze for several weeks and no one in the New Jersey/ New York area was able to clam. Shortly after clammers resumed work, they were shut down again by a disastrous sewer spill from an outdated treatment plant on the Raritan River. A pipe burst in March of that year and spewed nearly 600 million gallons of untreated sewerage into the Raritan River, which feeds the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays. Important clamming grounds were closed for six weeks following the spill. The August 2003 blackout that affected New York City and much of the northeast and mid-west sent another 500 million gallons of untreated sewerage down the Passaic River into the Raritan Bay and closed shellfish beds once again for a few days. Fortunately, natural processes cleaned the water, as the Atlantic Ocean sweeps into the bays and rivers at each high tide. While some clammers were able to temporarily relocate to the Manasquan River and supply the plant with limited product, the plant worked at about a quarter of its capacity during the March and April sewer spill crisis. Some of Certified’s customers took that opportunity to try alternative products, including cheaper aquaculture-produced clams and wild clams harvested in Connecticut and Long Island. It has been a continuing effort to reclaim those clients. Some returned with limited orders, preferring to buy most of what they needed from cheaper sources. Certified lost some clients permanently.

When operating at full capacity, Certified employs 11 people and the plant employs 14, in addition to the 70 or so clammers who work regularly. Additionally, the J.T. White plant contracts work to a lab in Middletown, N.J., for daily testing. Three people at the lab handle the plant’s testing. About half of the employees from both businesses are Hispanic immigrant men

who live in the neighboring towns, Sea Bright, Red Bank, and Long Branch. They take a public bus to and from work. These men comprise much of the plant and wholesale labor force. Most of the remaining employees are white males, who serve as drivers, managers, plant operators and other laborers. One woman was employed as a driver for a while and a few other women work with various record keeping and accounting aspects of the businesses. One of the contracted lab employees is a woman. Most of the white employees of the plant and wholesale operation (and one recent African-American hire) live in Highlands. Certified competes for drivers with other trucking companies in the area. Just across the river from Highlands, another depuration plant in Sea Bright offers similar work but has half the capacity. The J.T. White plant tends to lose three or so people each month and Certified loses one or two. Neither the plant, wholesale business nor the Association offers medical insurance or other benefits aside from wages, although one key informant says, "We're working on it."

Data regarding crab harvests are as unreliable as those for wild harvest clams. While the crabbers submit monthly harvest reports, that sometimes include the county and sometimes the body of water, any geographically specific data would be difficult to assemble and still incomplete. However, statewide, the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife issued 345 pot licenses and 290 dredge licenses in 2002. New Jersey potters harvested more than 3.5 million pounds of hard and peeler crabs in 2002, while dredgers harvested nearly 900,000 pounds, statewide. The total value for crabs harvested in New Jersey in 2002 was \$6.7 million with peelers accounting for more than \$550,000, with the potential to shed and be sold as soft crabs, a value-added product. There are a couple of small-scale shedding operations in town.

### Seasonal Round

Some kind of commercial fishing occurs year round in Highlands, except when severely cold winters freeze the bay and rivers. Lobstermen usually pot for crabs and lobsters from March through October then shift into clamming and crab dredging in October, November and December, continuing with their crab dredging through the early spring. In 2002, however, they pulled up their pots and started clamming in September because lobster catches were so low. For most fishermen, even those who work a variety of species, clamming has become their mainstay industry. Catching eels is also a very small fishery that has long supplemented Highlands commercial fishers. Historically, fishermen cut through ice in rivers to spear hibernating eels under the surface, practiced rarely since the early 1970s (McKenzie 1992). Now a few fishermen tie cylinder eel pots to docks. Potting season was from March to December and in 1980 supported 10 fishermen, in 1989, 4 and in 1991 only 2 (McKenzie1992). Now only a few fishermen use engage in this, mostly for subsistence.

Clamming in Highlands can occur all year except when the bay freezes, making the clam beds inaccessible. Markets also dictate the amount of work clammers can do. Although the plant claims to take as many clams as they can hold, the clam market is seasonal. People want to buy clams during winter holidays and in the summertime, but the market slows during other times of the year diminishing especially in October and November when it has been customary for clammers to take some time off. The sales manager for Certified Clam recently (as of 2003) harnessed a national account – putting Highlands clams in 480 A&P supermarkets in the eastern half of the U.S. in an attempt to maintain a steadier business year round.

Despite market fluctuations, the business is relatively reliable and year round with lots of potential for overtime, except when the bay and rivers freeze or an environmental disaster like a sewer spill closes the waters. As one of the manager's notes, employment at the plant and the wholesale business is steadier than "a leaf job" --- meaning the landscaping work that is often the alternative for the immigrant and low-skilled laborers employed by the depuration plant and its associated wholesale business.

### Fishing Grounds/Fleet Activity

Highlands commercial clammers will not show up on NMFS Vessel Trip Record data. Their grounds include the state certified areas of the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays and the Shrewsbury and Navesink Rivers. In 2003, several of the Highlands clammers traveled south to Manasquan River in central New Jersey where the state had recently certified waters in response to a sewer spill closure. However, only those clammers with trailers to truck their boats the 30 or so miles to that area were able to take advantage of the provisional. The areas that are open or "certified" for clamming in the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays is circumscribed by bayshore development and other environmental factors. "Certified" waters indicate that the area is minimally polluted and clams taken from there must undergo a depuration process before they are safe for human consumption. There are very limited "open" water areas where clams can be taken and sold directly for human consumption but only a handful of clammers harvest from them. Those areas supplement incomes but cannot sustain an industry. No clamming is allowed near certain shore-side uses (like functioning docks) or within a certain radius of a sewer outfall pipe that spills treated sewage into the bay. Highlands clammers have most recently (2003) concentrated their work in a certified part of the Raritan Bay known as "Area 11" because clams there are of good size and easy to harvest.

Lobstermen in Highlands used to fish offshore in the Hudson Canyon, a three-day trip from Highlands, but now keep their operations closer to home. They set their pots mostly in state waters and some areas near shore in the Atlantic Ocean.

### Crew Description

Two of the three lobster boats in town are captained by father and son and each hires one or two Hispanic men as mate and crew, immigrants who live in nearby cities and get rides to and from home and the bank from their employer. At times people in Highlands have worked as crewmembers on the larger boats fishing out of Belford, or have run their own boats. These men typically are either Belford Co-op members themselves or are the family or fictive kin of co-op members. Mostly, however, the commercial fishermen in Highlands work alone.

Clammers typically work alone. When a mate is aboard, he or she sorts the clams while the captain continues raking or while he drives the boat to the clam plant to deliver the day's catch. The captains are all white men of a wide range of ages, with a few in their 20s and a few in the 70s. The crews are sometimes wives or girlfriends, brothers or sons. Because of a lock on membership in the Baymen's Association, there is some concern that the next generation of clammers is not being recruited and trained. Many clammers have little or no education beyond high school. Some have not completed high school. However, there are a few clammers with college degrees who have worked in other professions and returned to clamming because it is something they love to do. Some are retired from other jobs. Many are commercial fishermen who have given up on other fisheries. The clammers come from within a 100-mile radius of

Highlands. Only about 18 actually live in the borough or nearby. Some live in other parts of Monmouth County, in Ocean County just to the south, in Staten Island New York, and in southern New Jersey near Barnaget Bay. Many Highlands clammers moved south during the years of the closures to be near open clam beds. Others moved later as Highlands became less affordable a place to live.

### Infrastructure

Highlands offers adequate infrastructure to support the existing fishing community. In fact, it is the infrastructure in Highlands that has resurrected the commercial clamming industry in this urbanized section of New Jersey. The larger of two clam depuration plants in this area is located in Highlands and the availability dockage for clam boats keeps the commercial fishing community here in business. However, the infrastructure is minimal compared to the capabilities of decades past, when there were several soft clam depuration plants, facilities for landing other fisheries, lobster pounds, and even earlier when there were clam processing facilities.

Currently landing space for fisheries other than clamming is virtually non-existent. There are no places to pack out fish or for commercial fishers to land other catches in Highlands. One family land lobster and crabs caught by their own boats at their own dock, leasing the riparian rights from the state each year. This family uses their dock as a retail market and distributes wholesale lobsters from there as well. A few other fishermen land their catches at the Belford Co-op. One source says there are private buyers who come to Highlands from New York City and Philadelphia to buy fish for retail markets, and says that some of the charter boats in town illegally sell to those buyers. Another charter boat uses a wholesaler's license to supply an associated restaurant in northern New Jersey with freshly caught fish. Commercial fishermen would like to see more landing space that would allow for expansion into other fisheries.

Seven marinas in Highlands and many individual boat slips and small docks along the waterfront provide adequate dockage for the commercial industry in Highlands. However, some commercial fishers are concerned that may change, as property values increase and marinas cater to high-end boaters.

The streets of Highlands' bayside section are narrow, flood-prone and usually lined with parked cars. Lack of parking is a major problem in the borough and a source of contention with some residents and the wholesale clam operation. The larger plant parking lot provides parking for some nearby residents, particularly for a summer bungalow community and occasional storage space for boat trailers and other equipment. Another waterfront lot owned by the borough but known as "the baymen's lot" or "the association lot" until recently was the location baymen used to store equipment, including crab and lobster traps, and for boat repair. The lot had become less used over the years and the borough recently negotiated a lease with a nearby waterfront restaurant/ bar/ nightclub that needed additional valet parking space. In the last 20 years it has become illegal to keep crab and lobster traps in yards and to park boats on trailers or blocks on the street.

The plant, located on the waterfront where clammers land their catch, is nestled among residential and summer housing beyond a tangle of narrow one-way streets usually lined with parked cars. Company trucks transport purified clams the several blocks from the plant to the wholesale operation (Certified Clam) located on Bay Avenue, the main street in Highlands that

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run almost the entire length of the low-lying section, with easy access on each end to the state highway that segments the low-lying area from the wealthier coastal bluff. During the time of this research, the wholesale parking, warehouse and office front faced a side street. Occasionally 18-wheel trucks traverse Bay Avenue and load or unload along that road. Certified's loading area faces a small side street that is difficult for 18-wheel trucks to negotiate. It seems that as the wholesale company expands, larger accommodations with better parking and loading facilities will become necessary.

The supplies for commercial fishing and for the auxiliary industry businesses are relatively available nearby, either in Highlands, along the Bayshore, south along the Atlantic Coast, or by mail order delivery. A local marina operator says that his business supplies used parts to baymen who "are a creative bunch" and can piece together a motor from four or five old broken ones. A 1982 report also noted the frugality and creativity of Highlands baymen (Caruso 1982). The baymen do not have insurance for their small boats or equipment and rarely take out loans because the type of bay fishing they do involves a relatively small capital outlay. Bookkeeping and accounting are often done by wives, girlfriends and in some cases by another former clammer who is now an accountant in New York City.

A network of wholesale and retail businesses seems to provide adequate infrastructure for the existing fisheries. These businesses also draw on remnants of the older fishing community of Highlands, in that they are often operated by long-time fishing families involved in traditional fisheries and tend to engage the town's reputation for seafood. Restaurants and retail markets that peddle non-local seafood also benefit from tourists attracted to the idea of local fresh catches. Some businesses in town sell more local seafood than others.

Highlands Borough Hall reports six mercantile licenses related to wholesale and seafood production. One of those is for a defunct business whose property on the main street in town has recently been sold in a tax lien sale. The businesses currently in operation include: a family-owned wholesale and retail seafood business that deals mostly in lobster supplied mostly by family boats and other local producers; another popular wholesale/retail business that rarely buys and sells local catches; a hard crab and soft shell wholesale business run by long-time local crabbing family that doesn't advertise or have a visible sign in town; a clam depuration plant supplied by clammers who live in town or keep their boats in town and are members of the local Baymen's Association; a clam wholesale business that is supplied mostly by the depuration plant. Additionally a refrigerated delivery truck parks in town frequently, as the owner is related to one of the local business owners, and advertises a local phone number but does not have borough mercantile license. This business involves mostly buying and selling Delaware Bay oysters. By far, the largest operation in town is the hard clam industry, with its integrated purification plant, wholesale operation and an association of small-boat suppliers

#### *Integration of depuration, sales and clammers*

The J.T. White plant, built in 1995, is named for a long-time commercial clammer and former Highlands mayor who spearheaded efforts to develop a depuration plant for hard clams in Highlands but died before the plant opened. He resurrected the Baymen's Protective Association, latent from decades of pollution-related bay closures, in order to apply for a grant from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The Association members meet each month with their

executive board and the general manager of Certified, who is also a former clammer and a Baymen's Association member<sup>1</sup>. Meetings are announced through a notice on the bulletin board at the clam depuration plant. Often in loud and gruff terms, the members discuss price fluctuations in the clam industry, the more marketable clams versus the easiest to harvest, clamming locations, and access to membership status. Baymen seem to prefer the current system of operation, with their association and integrated management, to the previous one of outside managers.

The Highlands clammers won a legal battle to remove the plant's first managers from their positions, believing that the managers were using various tactics to steal from them. They also argued that the managers were not selling the clams as well as they should have because they had no financial stake in the sales. The managers, on the other hand, argued that baymen were supplying the plant with a product they knew to be unmarketable – clams that were too small. After much legal and political wrangling, which included the plant doors being locked by the borough government for several days during a peak market season, the Baymen's Association gained control of the clam plant and sales. The J.T. White Clam Depuration Plant and Certified Clam, the wholesale operation, both are run with oversight from the Baymen's Association. The Association board hires and fires employees of both businesses. The general manager for Certified works solely on commission from what he sells, and Association members are supposed to reap any profits from Certified. During its first two years in business, Certified had not yet turned a profit. It had, however, significantly reduced the debt it inherited, a \$1 million payment judges ordered the Association to pay the former managers for canceling their contract early. The first managers' contract was structured to repay them for money they invested in the construction of the plant, supplementary to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey grant awarded to the borough on behalf of the Baymen's Protective Association.

Membership status is the most controversial of the issues among the Highlands baymen. There are different levels of membership in the association, which translates into different access to clams. The plant distributes baskets each morning, depending on how many it can put into the process that day. Full members get the most baskets, equally divided within that category. Associate members get fewer baskets, equally divided among them. Members pay \$250 a year fees. Associate and full members invested different amounts to buy in initially when the association reassembled. About 10 long-time Highlands residents are allowed to clam without being Association members. They are considered "street" clammers and receive even fewer baskets. A few Highlands residents feel shut out of the process and sell their clams to the Sea Bright plant across the river. The Association limits its membership to ensure enough full-time work for each member. Because the clam plant has a limited capacity, the members are limited to the number of bushels they can sell, and therefore limited in the number of baskets they harvest.

### Economic Networks

Employees and owners of local seafood businesses develop friendships with people in their extended economic networks who they talk to on the phone regularly, buying or selling products and discussing shipping and price details. Trust and good communication is particularly

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<sup>1</sup> The General Manager of Certified Clam who was interviewed for this research was recently ousted and replaced by a woman who ran her family's lobster business and was also involved with a local economic development organization.

important in these industries where weather variations and other unexpected occurrences can unhinge the best laid plans. Miscalculations and late or inaccurate deliveries can result in a chain reaction of angry clients and lost business. As a result, social relationships become very important within these economic networks.

The wholesalers in Highlands continue to develop markets out of town to sell locally landed clams, as well as lobster, crab and other kinds of seafood. Wholesalers also buy from other ports to supplement local catches. Highlands is linked to New York, not just by the borough's commuter ferry service but through seafood sales to dealers in the Fulton Street Fish Market.<sup>2</sup> Certified Clam transports product in small, refrigerated trucks and vans to markets in New York City market and other locations, including upstate New York, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Massachusetts, Illinois and various locations in New Jersey. The business sells to wholesale markets, retail markets and restaurants. Additionally, it sells to the occasional walk-up customer at their wholesale office in Highlands, although the office is not well-suited to retail sales.<sup>3</sup>

The general manager says he tries to keep the prices of clams high by selling them out of state. Certified Clam sells the clams processed at the J.T. White Depuration Plant and another 400-500 bushels each week that the business purchases from around the region, as well as about 200 bags of Delaware Bay or Louisiana oysters plus some lobsters occasionally in the summer. All the non-clam products sold at Certified total about 5 percent of the company's business. Certified recently (as of 2003) got a contract to supply clams to all the A&P Food Stores in the eastern U.S. and is sending them in new boxes emblazoned with the Certified Clam logo and the borough name.

Local clams compete with clams produced by aquaculture in places like Virginia and southern New Jersey that tend to be sold more cheaply than the clams harvested by Highlands baymen. More recently, additional competition comes from displaced lobstermen from the Long Island Sound. Since the lobster disappeared from that area, many of the lobstermen in Connecticut and Long Island have shifted to harvesting hard clams. Clams from these areas do not need depuration so harvesters are not as limited as Highlands clammers. Highlanders say these new clammers do not mind lower prices per clams because they can simply catch and sell more clams, while the Highlands clammers need high prices per clam to make a living, limited as they are by amounts the depuration plant can process at a time. Clam markets are linked to the general U.S. economy and are down a bit because of the general economic slump that seems to have strained usually reliable customers like casinos and cruise lines. Locally, the sewer spills of 2003 have recently given clams from the Raritan and Sandy Hook bays a bad name. Despite the natural tidal process that restores the bays and the depuration process that purifies each clam, some restaurant goers have recently referred to clams from this area as "sludge clams", and following the spill, restaurant workers often claimed their clams came from elsewhere, even when they were depurated local clams.

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<sup>2</sup> Since the conclusion of this research, the historic Fulton Street Fish Market has relocated to a new facility.

<sup>3</sup> Since the conclusion of this research, Certified Clam has expanded its operation into a storefront on Bay Avenue in the same block as the parking and warehouse.

The Highlands clammers prefer filling baskets with small clams (Little Necks) because they get paid per clam and can fit more Little Necks into their allotted basket than they can the larger sized clams. This results in their wholesaler having to purchase clams from other locations to fill orders for larger-sized clams. Although the Baymen's Association effectively manages the wholesale business and will reap any profits the young company produces, few of the Association members seem to have a sense of common ownership in the business, or have taken responsibility for supplying a sellable product. The sense of common ownership may begin to develop when and if the wholesale company begins to turn a profit.

The economic link between commercial fishermen and recreational fishermen was stronger when porgies were more plentiful, an important bait fish for commercial and recreational fisheries in the 1980s that tied several fisheries together. Pound nets in the 1980s sold bait to passing recreational fishing boats on water and purse seines sold bait to lobster boats (McKenzie 1991). Of all informants interviewed, only one bait shop owner mentioned a bait fisherman, a man who pots for killies and wholesales them as live bait.

### Social Networks

Social and economic connections link commercial fishermen throughout the New Jersey Bayshore. Highlands and Belford are considered to be the two commercial fishing communities on the bayshore, although commercial fishermen live in Leonardo, Middletown, and throughout the region. There is a history of Highlands residents crewing for one of the larger commercial Belford boats. Fishermen drink together at Highlands bars, share information and inside connections about jobs at the Belford co-op or one of the seafood businesses in Highlands, they may live in Highlands and work in Belford, or the reverse. In the past, the Belford Cooperative hosted an annual Christmas party for commercial fishermen in their network. The cooperative also is the focus of political mobilization of commercial fishermen in the region regarding federal fishing regulations. Several Highlands fishers participated in a large march on Washington D.C. years ago that the Belford Cooperative organized.

In general, work at the clam depuration and wholesale businesses moves through word of mouth, as people within these social and economic networks share information about job openings and references for potential employees. Other work may also become available for people involved in the social and economic networks of the Highlands fishing community. For example, wives of commercial fishermen pay each other for babysitting services and reciprocate favors. The clam wholesale business provides one of their customers with clam shuckers for a raw clam bar. This paying job typically goes to an Association clammer.

Commercial fishermen in Highlands tend to know other baymen who use the same fishing grounds throughout the Hudson-Raritan Estuary, from the New Jersey Bayshore north to Jones Inlet in New York's Long Island and south along the Atlantic coast to Belmar and Point Pleasant, New Jersey. Even as far south as near Atlantic City, a large inshore clam wholesale operation throws an annual block party that some Highlands clammers and clam industry representatives attend.

Fishermen on the water converse on the radio, and clammers sidle up to each other's boats as they dig in productive grounds to shout conversation over the water. These conversations can be

personal, about children or wives or health. They can also be professional, about the next productive clamming grounds or warnings that the plant is expected to recall baskets. The social networks that permeate the commercial fishing community in Highlands have eroded from previous eras in which the entire bayside section of town was populated by families involved in commercial fishing and clamming and various kinds of seafood processing and sales.

However, baymen still gather socially, drinking together at local bars, dining together and with their families at local restaurants and for various fundraisers and other important social events in the town, such as Democratic Party events, the annual Clam Fest, and for more routine meetings over morning coffee or at their boat docks. Social networks and community relations remain important for not just for commercial baymen but for their friends and family and for other borough residents. These social networks distribute jobs periodically among borough residents and also disperse the blows from the economic vagaries of the seafood industry. Those same social networks may also result in increased obligations and retribution, for example frequent requests from employees to borrow money and personal attacks when an employee or former employee feels slighted.

While there used to be more family socializing among commercial fishermen, now they just gather for funerals mostly, says one. Two clammers drowned in the last few years and their surviving dependents received financial and other kinds of aid from baymen and the families of baymen, local seafood businesses, as well as other businesses in Highlands. Passengers on the commuter ferries even contributed donations in the weeks following the accident. Last year, a recent high school graduate, a local young man with familial ties to commercial clamming who had clammed a bit during high school, was working as a driver for the clam wholesale business when he was killed in a traffic accident. Much of the town mourned the young man's death. For months after his death, there were temporary exhibits of mourning throughout town, such as flowers and notes at the tree that he hit and shoe polish painted on cars. More permanent signs of community commemoration included the company painting his name and dates of birth and death on one of their delivery trucks and photos of the young man hanging in local diners and at the depuration plant, along side photos of the clammers who drowned the few years before.

Baymen tend to participate in local community activities. Even those who do not live in town return to Highlands for dinner, drinks or other community events. In 2002, Certified Clam donated clams to sell at the borough's annual summertime Clam Fest with proceeds going to the borough's volunteer fire department. Baymen also provide other donations and participate in fundraisers to benefit local organizations and individuals. Many of the resident commercial fishermen are currently or have been volunteer firemen for the borough. Also mayors and council members have often been baymen or their relatives, although this has not been true for the past few years.

There tend to be good relations between the individual recreational fishermen and commercial clammers in Highlands. The clammers do not compete with recreational or for-hire fishermen for species or space in the way that commercial fin-fishermen and lobstermen do. One commercial clammer wrote a note on the side of his boat directed to the captain and mate of the charter boat in the next slip, thanking them for regularly leaving him some of their catch of fresh fish. The charter boat captains and crew often drink at the same bars as the commercial clammers and

other baymen. Also, the lobstermen and the for-hire fishermen have the same complaints about beach replenishment covering up valuable ocean habitat just off of the Atlantic coast at what is called the Shrewsbury Rocks. However, commercial clambers do express a sense of solidarity with other commercial fishermen, such as draggers and other net fishers who are often vilified by recreational and for-hire fishers. One clammer notes that he would like to be able to make money dragging for fish, but is shut out of the industry by what he considers to be an alignment of political and social forces that sway regulations to favor recreational fishing interests.

### **Discussion: Community/fisheries dependency and engagement**

The borough as a whole benefits from the commercial fishing industry in terms of the name recognition and reputation for fresh catches that it provides, as well as the money that circulates through town as a result. In addition to the numbers of currently employed individuals involved in the commercial fishing industry in Highlands, turnover at the clam plant and wholesale business and other businesses in town redistributes income to more people than the full-employment numbers suggest.

Restaurants serving seafood benefit from town's reputation as a seafood producing area and from visible fishing boats and equipment. Several restaurants also actually purchase their seafood from local harvesters and wholesalers. Breakfast and lunch places in town benefit from an influx of clambers six days a week. Katz's is a local institution where many clambers stop for coffee on their way to the plant to pick up their baskets.

Commercial fishermen argue that clambers spend money in town and commuters don't. The clambers rent boat slips in town, buy fuel for their boats and for the trucks in town, buy breakfast and coffee at local restaurants, return with families for dinner. "You have 60 to 70 people [a day] spending money in town, myself included," notes one clammer who lives outside of Highlands. "When I go to drink, I go to Highlands. The commuters go to Rumson [a very wealthy inland town]." A leader in the baymen's association said that 40 percent of the clambers spend money in Highlands' bars each payday (Thursdays). The commercial clamming industry and other seafood businesses use bayshore banks for their payroll and other accounts, as well as using local mechanics, the borough hardware store, refrigerator service and painters.

The borough's annual summertime Clam Fest showcases local and nearby businesses and restaurants and provides carnival rides and games that draw crowds of children, teens and adults. The Clam Fest evokes the borough's connection with clamming in its name, by selling locally caught stemmed clams and by hosting a clam shucking competition. The borough's official website details its clamming history, while acknowledging the industry's continued presence. Clammers believe that the industry provides good publicity throughout the east coast for the borough of Highlands through their delivery trucks and boxes that advertise the Certified Clam logo and the borough name. One borough official was pleased with the name recognition that the plant afforded. Despite the 2003 sewer spills, the town is widely known as a source of quality clams.

Many commercial fishermen in Highlands share typical conflicts with recreational fishermen. For example, recreational boaters and fishermen sometimes snag lobster and crab pot lines and, either from spite or ignorance, usually fail to retie the line properly and cause the commercial

fisherman to lose that pot. Net fishermen tend to have a more difficult time with anglers on the water. “The pole fishermen think that we’re raping the sea, but really all it is is you’re fishing where they want to be,” says one Highlands commercial fisherman. “You’re up at six in the morning, and they’re up at eight. Of course you’re going to be where they want to be.” He says that he has been cursed at and pelted with sinkers when he has refused to relocate a stationary net that he set and was monitoring.

## B. Recreational Fishing

### History and Current Description

Highlands is considered a good port from which to recreationally fish because of its easy access to both ocean and sheltered water. Also, channels through the shallow bay concentrate fluke, the area’s main “money fish”. The access to sheltered water is particularly helpful for fishing in rough weather or with groups of families with small children. Like Atlantic Highlands, the boats fishing from here have more options than boats farther south in New Jersey with only ocean access. Highlands’ recreational fisheries profile mirrors Atlantic Highlands in terms of crew, ownership, clientele, seasonal round and targeted species, as well as in criticisms of federal management and commercial finfish fishermen. Unless there are exceptions, these issues will not be restated here. The main difference between Highlands and Atlantic Highlands for-hire, boat rental, and private boat recreational fisheries regards infrastructure. The boats in Atlantic Highlands dock in a large municipal marina with a public launch, fuel dock, and ample parking. The group of for-hire boats benefits from advertising through the harbor’s telephone recorded message and from clustering together in a highly trafficked area. While the Highlands charter boats are scattered in one of the borough’s many marinas and docks, and only one party boat remains in town.

Head boats appeared in the Sandy Hook and Raritan Bays in the 1950s and were generally about 65 feet in length, 18 feet in width. These boats were popular because they brought anglers to good fishing locations (McKenzie 1992). One key informant says there were six party boats in Highlands at the peak of that industry in the 1950s. Most docked at Pier 7, which is now Gateway Marine, a high-end rack service. Another informant says that Highlands used to be the “headquarters” for party boats 20 years ago but that now dock space is limited along the borough’s gentrifying waterfront. He blamed the loss of the boats at Pier 7 to increases in real estate taxes. By 1989, there were only two party boats in Highlands (McKenzie 1992). Now there is one, which docks on the river at a main entrance to town between two very popular seafood restaurants: Bahr’s and Moby’s. The owner of these long-established restaurants hosts a recreational fishing report website, which is also featured as a link on the official website of neighboring Atlantic Highlands. A few charter boats worked the Raritan Bay in the 1980s and tended to be about 30 to 35 feet in length (McKenzie 1992). These boats fared better than the party boats and have increased in number to at least a half dozen working from Highlands alone. One informant suggested there were as many as a dozen working in town. The boats are considered to be small businesses and have recently been required to obtain mercantile licenses through the borough government. Most of the captains and owners of those businesses live in Monmouth County, with one actually listing his residence as Highlands and two listing residences in northern New Jersey.

In addition to the party boat and charter boats, there is one livery boat rental service in town, which is associated with a bait shop and fuel dock. This service rents small fiberglass boats with outboard motors. People mostly use them to go fishing or crabbing, says the owner. Ten years ago there were three similar livery services. Now only one remains.

Numerous private boats launch from Highlands for recreational fishing. After World War II, recreational fishing blossomed on the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays. The number of privately owned, fiberglass boats increased dramatically. On any good summer weekend in the 1980s, at least one hundred of those 18-20 foot boats were on the bay carrying one to four anglers fishing for fluke, according to McKenzie (1992), who also cites McHugh 1990 for a survey that indicates New York and New Jersey anglers in the 1980s caught more bluefish and winter flounder than commercial harvesters, caught the same amount of fluke and weakfish, and caught fewer porgies. Since then, the boats, still misleadingly referred to as “small boats”, have increased in number and in size.

Anglers also fish from the bulkheads in Highlands or from either the ocean or bay beaches across the river at the Sandy Hook Gateway National Park. On the ocean side of Sandy Hook, surf fishers cast into the ocean while anglers and seine-netters fish the calmer waters of bay. The seine-netters often include ethnic minorities who fish for small food fish as well as anglers who seine for bait. Anglers also dig on Sandy Hook for various kinds of worms to use as bait.

Surf fishers on Sandy Hook form their own kind of recreational fishing community. They stick one or a few poles in the sand, share pleasantries with each other and sometimes also share fishing information, bait, tackle or a soda. During the summer, when the National Park becomes crowded with beach goers and charges \$10/car parking fees, the beach casters are relegated to a particular portion of the ocean side beach, Area F. They do not have to pay parking fees there, but also have meager restroom facilities compared to the other beach areas. Surf fishers range in age, ethnicity and income-level (although there are no “rich folks” as one surf fisher noted). Both men and women and occasionally small children fish in Area F and, during the off-season, elsewhere on the ocean beach.

Some surf fishers travel from New Jersey’s urban centers to relax, feel free and breathe fresh ocean air. “When people come to the beach, it makes your body more relaxed,” says one Hispanic surf fisher who works at a Shop Rite in northern New Jersey. “When you go back to your town, you smell all the pollution, cars, garbage.” Other surf fishers come from surrounding suburbs. This group of surf fishers spend as little money as possible on the sport and appreciate the low-cost and subsistence potential of surf fishing. They only fish once to half a dozen times each year at the beach, or occasionally take a ride on a party boat. They tend to watch sea gulls as an indication of where fish are schooling.

Another group of fishermen spend thousands of dollars on equipment and its members consider themselves to be semi-professional fishermen. They fish nearly every day, sometimes twice a day. These form another sort of community of serious anglers who travel a circuit of recreational fishing spots and tournaments, the most prestigious of which is the Governor’s Cup in Long Beach Island. One surf fisher at Sandy Hook notes, “Normally, when you talk about community, you’re talking about this area – geographically. But you have a problem with that because we

travel.” He says the community of recreational fishers is mobile, fishing along the Bayshore and New Jersey Atlantic Coast to Long Beach Island, depending on seasons and when the beachgoers and swimmers arrive. Surf fishers see this area as a “bedroom community” of people commuting to jobs outside of the area and say that its residents and local governments are not dependent on commercial or recreational fishing.

The surf fishers have little effect on Highlands, but do contribute to the economy of the bayshore as a whole. They typically by-pass the little town on their way to the beach, stopping earlier for gasoline, groceries or fast food in Atlantic Highlands or before. They expressed little or no interest in the newer shops and restaurants in Highlands, but said they might stop by for some refreshments (either on the highway or in town) while they wait for the tide to change.

Highlands is located at the eastern end of New Jersey Highway 36, just before the highway turns south along the Atlantic Shore. Anglers from northern New Jersey find the town about 12 miles from the Garden State Parkway exit 117. However, they often stop along the commercially dense highway to purchase bait, tackle, ice and food for their fishing trips. Out of town anglers, especially those who fish across the river on Sandy Hook, often mistake the borough boundaries as beginning close to the Parkway exit. This may be facilitated by the fact that a popular bait shop along the highway, miles from Highlands, sports a decorative “Highlands, New Jersey” painted sign.

#### Clientele, Seasonal Round, Fishing Grounds, Crew

The issues of clientele, seasonal round, fishing grounds and crew are the same in Highlands as they are in Atlantic Highlands, except that Highlands’ only party boat is owned and operated by a man whose son serves as his only mate. The Highlands party boat and charter boats complain about the same shift in their clients as do the Atlantic Highlands boats. This is the same shift that for-hire boats in Freeport, Point Lookout, and Sheepshead Bay, New York complain about. Informants in all of those areas complain that clients have shifted from “real” fishermen to “tourists”, a younger crowd with less knowledge and less consistency in the numbers of trips they take. Informants in Highlands and Atlantic Highlands also report the same diversity of income, ethnicity, age and gender of their clients.

The seasonality of for-hire recreational fishing in Highlands is also similar to Atlantic Highlands. The party and charter boats in Highlands, as well as the liveries and private boats in marinas, typically are in the water operating from March to December each year, depending on how cold the water is and whether there is ice in the river. During the off months of January and February, party and charter boat captains and crew work on their boats and go on vacations, although some charter boats work year round, traveling to southern waters or staying in local waters if the weather permits.

Employment related to recreational fishing in general seems to be on the rise, if you count the opening of a new marina. Regarding the for-hire industry specifically, however, things seem stable. The one party boat in town employs two people: the owner and his son. The 6-12 charter boats employ between 12 and 24 employees, estimating one captain and mate on each boat. The fuel docks and bait shops support only a few employees, which increases seasonally. There are more workers at marinas and docks in town, depending on the kinds of services they provide

their clients, such as marine repair, supply and boat storage. Still, many of these workers come from outside of Highlands.

In terms of seasonal catches, Highlands anglers, like those in Atlantic Highlands, basically target the fish that are legally available, with minor differences in what is available from shore, surf or from a boat. Fishing grounds for Highlands' recreational boats is the same as in Atlantic Highlands, and very similar to boats throughout the Hudson-Raritan Estuary to Jones Inlet in New York.

### Infrastructure

According to informants, the Borough prefers private recreational boats to party boats. One informant claims that a party boat captain trying to locate in Highlands a few years ago was "run out of town" by the local government. Still, there seem to be enough basic services in the area to support Highland's current party and charter boats, but there seems to be little room or incentive for expansion. In Highlands alone, there are eight boat docks and marinas, three additional areas for boat storage, two marine supply venues, four marine repair businesses, and three tackle and bait shops with associated fuel docks, and one boat rental service. There used to be six fuel docks and tackle shops in town. With the closure of four fuel docks, went two associated bait and tackle shops. There is also a one-man wholesale bait operation in town. Anglers, boat owners and for-hire recreational fishermen also buy supplies and services from businesses in neighboring towns along the bayshore, inland and south along the Atlantic coast. There are no boat launches in town and no facility for clustering party boats as in Atlantic Highlands. Many boats launch from the Atlantic Highlands marina at the beginning of each season. Some for-hire boats were affected when a haul out facility closed in Belford about 7 years ago. Space for personal boat storage has increased throughout town in the past 10 years. Additionally, parking is limited in town and the lack of parking limits the business that for-hire boats can do. Several informants noted that the borough could have built a harbor like Atlantic Highlands, but chose not to.

### Economic and Social Networks

The geography of the party and charter boat industry and other recreational fishing in Highlands is regional, like neighboring Atlantic Highlands. Clients come from Pennsylvania and northern NJ or New York City as well as suburban New Jersey. Support facilities for the industry stretch along the Bayshore and the Atlantic Coast. People involved in the recreational and for-hire fishing industries live in Highlands, in Monmouth County and beyond. Fewer for-hire fishermen live and socialize in town than commercial fishermen. There are several exceptions: a few crew members who drink at local bars with commercial fishermen, a charter captain who lives in town.

## **III. Vulnerability and Cumulative Impacts**

### Commercial Fishing / Recreational Fishing

The for-hire fishing industry in Highlands, like in Atlantic Highlands, competes with other forms of entertainment as boats lose their regular customers. Another significant challenge to Highlands' for-hire recreational fishing industry is a lack of a centralized docking space. Both the commercial and for-hire industries confront challenges from gentrification, environmental pollution and federal regulations.

### A. Gentrification and Economic Development

Highlands has many indicators of gentrification, including increasing property values, immigration of a professional class, and changes in the goods and services available from local businesses and in support from local government.

Highlands officials trying to make the borough a “destination” for non-residents, increased number of official events in town from just a few to 14 annually. Some of the major events include the Clam Fest, fishing tournaments, a summer concert series held on a beach near condos and a ferry terminal, various parades and car shows. Despite major parking problem in the bayside part of the borough, officials allowed the construction of what is considered to be a “destination” business without nearly adequate parking. This restaurant/bar/nightclub, with waterfront views and a few slips for passing boaters to dock and dine, draws many people to Highlands for lunch or an evening out.

For many commercial and for-hire fishermen on the Bayshore, Highlands has always been a “destination”. Retired fishermen and fishermen who have gone temporarily into other work return to Highlands regularly, each afternoon or evening or a few nights a week to socialize at Highlands bars where they see long-time acquaintances who include local baymen and their families as well as a couple of for-hire fishermen.

According to town officials and a few in the for-hire and recreational fishing industries, fast-speed commuter ferry services have had a positive effect on the town by increasing the desirability of the town as a place to live. The ferries cut the commuting time from Highlands to Manhattan from about 2 hours each way to about 40 minutes. A commuter ferry service has been in Highlands since the 1980s, although that industry has upgraded since 1994. Some commercial fishers say that in the past 10 years the ferry has contributed to the displacement of low-income fishing families. “It used to be a clamming town – a fishing town – now it’s full of yuppies,” says one lifelong bayman who also notes that many of the fishing families have moved out as property taxes have increased, replaced by New Yorkers willing and able to pay the higher taxes and property costs. To the question of whether Highlands is a fishing community, he answers, “That’s a tough one. Things are changing.” He said Highlands is still a fishing town but much less of one than it was 30 years ago.

One commercial fisherman relayed a story about a conflict between neighbors over lobster traps. Apparently a New York City professional moved to Highlands 20 years ago partly because he appreciated the picturesque fishing community that it was then. He moved next door to a long-time lobsterman whose practice was to haul in his lobster traps each October to clean them in his waterfront yard. The new neighbor didn’t like living next to lobster traps covered in rotting ocean growth so he enlisted the health department and zoning board to stop the storage of traps in his neighbor’s yard. The year-round residency of New York commuters has resulted in changes in how the fishing community conducts its business. Another change in recent decades is the prohibition of parking boats and trailers on neighborhood streets.

Small privately owned docks and boat slips behind private homes or restaurants supplement the ample space afforded by the borough’s seven marinas. However, commercial boat owners and for-hire recreational boats are concerned that eventually, dockage will become scarce in town, as

more docks and marinas convert their facilities and services to cater to high-paying private leisure boat clients.

Still a commercial baymen who lives several miles away from Highlands in a more expensive and spacious suburban community argues that Highlands hasn't really changed all that much. "Highlands is a blue-collar town. It's a working town. The people are one and the same," he says, meaning the clambers fit well with the blue-collar residential population. "If it was a town ... with lawyers and doctors, you'd see some friction. It's not changing. I never see it being like that. They want land and big houses and Highlands is small. The clam plant's in a perfect spot. It fits the town."

While the commuter ferry boats have brought change to Highlands, much of it unwanted by members of the commercial fishing industry, they have forged a link between the borough and the larger population center of New York City. The boats offer work opportunities as bar tenders or crew and also increase the potential markets for seafood products. One local business tried (pretty unsuccessfully) to harness that market by offering take-home clam bakes for sale at the terminal. Some in town believe local businesses need to try harder to draw the commuter traffic into their shops. Locals complain about the streams of speeding cars through their town and the cars that park on borough streets, spilling out of the inadequate ferry parking lots. Although the parking problems remain, they have lessened slightly with the opening of the Belford commuter ferry a few miles away in October 2002.

It is an uneasy transition in the town, but there are indications that a sense of community can develop. For example, the ferry passengers donated money to collections on the boat for the families of clambers who drowned in 2000. Likewise, following the World Trade Center attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Highlands became an evacuation site for people fleeing Manhattan. Several commercial fishers piloted boats to help with the evacuation. Borough residents welcomed the city refugees into their town and also helped them get home. Many cars of the victims remained in the commuter parking lot for weeks after the attacks. Highlands also hosts a large sculpture that commemorates the victims of the attacks.

## B. Environment

The year 2003 was a bad one for local baymen with the bay frozen over for much of the winter and closed again for six weeks after a disastrous sewer spill at an outdated treatment plant on the Raritan River and then again after massive power outage sent untreated sewerage down the Passaic River and into the bay system. The Atlantic Ocean sweeps into the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays and the local rivers at each high tide and quicken recover from shore-side environmental disasters. Still, the lost work and the damaged reputation of local seafood are difficult to overcome.

Highlands lobstermen and the for-hire anglers share complaints about beach replenishment projects that protect a vulnerable thin strip of beachfront filled with million-dollar homes and condominiums in the towns of Sea Bright and Monmouth Beach. One particular project in 1995 dumped 100 barges of dredged sand and covered the Shrewsbury Rocks, what they say is valuable ocean habitat for lobsters and fish just off the Atlantic Coast. Commercial fishermen

say it is all about politics, and one lobsterman in the borough says, “There are more votes out on that strip than out here (in Highlands).”

Weather variations were considered to be the biggest environmental effect on the recreational industry, in terms of client preferences to fish in calm weather. These weather variations are considered natural, but client preferences are not. They reflect the “tourist” versus “real fishermen distinction” that for-hire fishermen complain about throughout the Hudson-Raritan Bay Estuary, tourists being less hearty and more likely to avoid fishing in winter and rough weather.

For-hire fishers say commercial draggers with a new technology called “rock hoppers” that allow the boats to drag over rocky ocean bottom that was previously inaccessible are damaging important ocean habitat and leaving fish with no where to hide. They blame the federal government for not limiting the use of these rock hoppers.

A local non-profit conservation organization called the New York/New Jersey Baykeeper has initiated an effort to restore oyster beds to the Raritan Bay. This nascent effort incorporates much involvement from the general population along the Bayshore and in riverfront communities farther inland. However, it is still far from developing a stock of oysters that could sustain renewed commercial harvest.

### C. Fisheries Management

As elsewhere, Highlands for-hire recreational fishers believe the NMFS favors commercial fishing interests, while commercial interests feel harassed by federal regulations and out-manuevered by recreational fishing interests. There is relatively little federal water commercial fishing in the borough any more. Inshore commercial clamming dominates local fisheries as more and more commercial fishers find their options in other fisheries too constrained by market forces, diminished stock and poor management. “It’s like putting Indians on a reservation,” said one commercial fisherman, meaning the limits in other fisheries have pushed commercial fishers to target this one species. The fisherman said that he believes market pressures have been more of a constraint than the government and adds, “Most clammers started out in something else but were put out of work.”

Regulations and late notice of fishing seasons has frustrated those fishermen who continue to target other species. For example, the one remaining gillnetter in town was fretting in October 2002 about when he could start fishing for blackfish, bluefish and weakfish. The same is true for businesses that depend on recreational anglers, as late notice of fishing seasons and limits makes it difficult to plan for fishing excursions.

Highlands commercial and for-hire fishermen who deal with federal regulations say that they have tried to participate in the management process at the federal level but have been frustrated with the results. A few have served on various task forces and committees and attended meetings. “They ask for your input, and it falls on deaf ears,” says one commercial fisherman. They say that the effort and expense and time away from the water and their boats are not worth the results. While none of the informants for this research were currently involved in fisheries management at the federal level, most fishermen knew people from other ports who were

continuing to participate. Most of the commercial baymen in Highlands, however, are clambers who deal with state regulators. The Baymen's Association works on state issues.

Highlands lobstermen blame regulations and technology for the dramatically diminished lobster fishery. A long-time lobsterman says that the shift from wooden to wire pots in 1975 allowed people to fish for lobster year round instead of spending the winter repairing their pots. He says the federal government should have placed trap limits on the lobster fleets back then, rather than letting the lobster populations diminish and only later imposing what lobstermen view as draconian restrictions on their efforts. He says the government should have phased in those limits earlier but over a longer period of time so that people could have adjusted their businesses. Three years ago, the federal government initiated a pot limit that slashed the effort of lobstermen in New Jersey. Highlands lobstermen went from fishing 1500 pots down to 800 pots in one season.

A Highlands lobsterman estimated a 15 percent loss in his usual catch when a new gauge size was enforced in August 2003. He complained about an increase in the size of the escape vent to let smaller lobsters out that regulators initiated in 2000 and argues that the area he fishes, near shore in the Sandy Hook and Raritan Bays and closer to shore in the Atlantic Ocean, is more of a breeding ground. The big lobsters come in this area just to breed. They live in the Hudson Canyon, a three-day trip by boat. He used to travel that far to set pots, but stopped in the mid-1980s because it is difficult to have a family life with that kind of travel involved in work. He says, "The wife said no more of that." He believes that with these management measures the lobster will rebound and will represent a new opportunity for commercial fishing, for those who can to return to the industry.

One baymen suggested that the government should re-seed the bay and rivers with soft clams from Maine, to renew that resource and industry. Many of the baymen interviewed for this project, and others in casual conversation around town, looked forward to a day when soft clams return to the bays in quantities to sustain a commercial harvest.

One marina operator said that limits on recreationally caught fish do not diminish his business – but that actually the private boat owner may take his boat out twice a week instead of one because of the low per day catch limits. For-hire fishermen had the same complaints in Highlands as in Atlantic Highlands regarding fluke size limits and quotas and other fin fish regulations.

#### D. Resilience and Representation

Highlands commercial and for-hire fishermen are the jack-of-all-trades type of people who live in an urban area with many other kinds of jobs around. When asked what alternatives are available for commercial fishermen who want to make a change or who can no longer fish, sources considered what other job opportunities in the urbanized area they would have the skills to do. Both commercial and for-hire fishermen could sell fish in a fish market because they are familiar with species and can fillet fish. They could work in construction, engine repair, welding, bartending, dock work, or as a crane operator. People with experience on larger boats have more heavy equipment skills. Fishermen in this area have many opportunities for other kinds of work, but choose to fish. They say they have a need to work on the water. The for-hire boat captains and owners consider re-fitting their boats or building faster boats to supplement the commuter ferry fleets. Crew and commercial fishermen consider crewing for the ferries, their knowledge of

the waters between Highlands and Manhattan an important attribute. At least one has taken a job with a ferry operator.

The Baymen's Association represents commercial baymen, specifically on clamming issues at the state and local level, most recently regarding compensation from the county sewerage authority responsible for the sewer spill that closed the bay for six weeks in spring 2003. A separate organization represents other bayshore clammers who feel like they have been treated badly by the Highlands Association. The Belford Cooperative has organized groups of bayshore fishermen in the past, including Highlanders, to travel to Washington D.C. to lobby federal legislators and are members of national organizations. Local commercial fishermen do not tend to belong to national organizations, but do join with larger groups on an ad hoc basis. Even the Baymen's Association was defunct for decades until the potential for clamming in the area returned. The for-hire fishers are familiar with the United Boatmen's Association recently revived by fishermen out of Point Lookout, New York. For-hire captains from the Jones Inlet to the Jersey Shore met in Highlands this past spring to discuss strategies for dealing with the regulatory environment.

Local political support has been strong for the commercial fishing industry in Highlands, but that seems to be waning. Since the beginning of the borough government, commercial fishermen and clammers have served as borough mayors and council members. However, there are currently no commercial fishermen on the council, and the current two-term mayor is not involved in commercial fishing. In his second run for office, he actually defeated a commercial fisherman vying to regain his former post as mayor. There is no organized opposition to commercial fishing in town and borough hall continues to lease waterfront property to the clam depuration plant for only \$500 per month and to support the industry in other ways. However, the day-to-day business of borough code enforcement and economic ventures are more and more favoring newcomers with different values and uses for the coastal resources than the commercial fishermen who once dominated the borough. Also, the recently adopted (October 2004) Master Plan for the Borough of Highlands positions clamming and commercial fishing as an historic feature and not as a potential for economic development. It instead positions the commuter ferries and leisure-oriented waterfront uses as opportunities for future economic growth.

The depuration plant is keeping commercial baymen employed, despite a decline in other fisheries. Locals believe that their clams are the best around and will sell well. However, they were discouraged by the recent sewer spills that polluted the bay and sullied the reputation of local shellfish. Although restaurants recently denied carrying clams from local waters customers asked, many of them still did (except of course in the weeks when the bays were closed). Raritan and Sandy Hook Bay clams have a longer shelf life than more southern clams, living for 10 days out of the water compared to only 4 or 5 days of other clams. This trust in the value of their product and the shift in control of the wholesale business to the Association, as well as a glimmer that soft clams may grow again in the area, gives local baymen some cautious optimism about the clamming industry. Still, clammers resent increased competition from commercial fishermen displaced from other fisheries. Charter fishers and marina operators seem to be doing well despite what they consider to be restrictive regulations on popular recreational species. The one party boat in the borough is a lone operation and that aspect of the for-hire industry does not seem to have any opportunity for expansion. The increased property values and attendant increases in property taxes that result from the borough's gentrification concern commercial

baymen and people in the for-hire fishing industry. Increasing regulations and decreasing catches of some species have disheartened both commercial and recreational fishermen and made them somewhat pessimistic about the future.

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