National Coastal Population Report

Population Trends from 1970 to 2020
Dear Reader,

This National Coastal Population Report continues the commitment by NOAA's National Ocean Service to describe the nation's coastal population, as a complement to the decadal Census conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. One of our nation’s ongoing challenges is to manage ecologically sensitive coastal areas such that future generations of Americans will continue to reap the immeasurable economic, cultural, recreational, and aesthetic benefits provided by our coastal resources. At the core of this management challenge are both the large numbers and high densities of residents and visitors at the coast.

This concentration of people impacts the integrity of coastal ecosystems, and at the same time, the lives and livelihoods of some of these residents and visitors can be at risk from natural processes at the coast – such as hurricanes, erosion, and sea level rise. This report explores this dynamic relationship by presenting both the population in Coastal Watershed Counties and in Coastal Shoreline Counties. Joined by our federal and state coastal management partners, we hope this reporting framework will both increase awareness and enhance policy discussions, by promoting a deeper understanding of our nation's coastal population.

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National Ocean Service
NOAA
National Coastal Population Report

Population Trends from 1970 to 2020

March 2013

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Our nation’s coastal resources have influenced American history and culture, and have drawn a substantial portion of our country’s population to the coast. The concentration of people and economic activity at the coast places pressures on ecologically sensitive coastal ecosystems and also leaves residents and visitors vulnerable to coastal hazards, such as hurricanes, erosion, and sea level rise. One focus of this management challenge is to understand who lives at the coast and how this population is changing. However, this is not a simple matter as federal agencies, researchers, and non-governmental organizations define “the coast” in various ways.

To increase consistency in how we describe our nation’s coastal population, this report presents the nation’s coastal population in two different lights. One is the population that lives in Coastal Watershed Counties, or those counties where a substantial portion of their land area intersect coastal watersheds, and consequently represent where land use changes and water quality impacts most directly impact coastal ecosystems. NOAA has historically reported population for Coastal Watershed Counties, and continues this framework in this report. For the first time, NOAA also presents the population that lives in a subset of Coastal Watershed Counties, the Coastal Shoreline Counties, or those counties directly adjacent to the open ocean, major estuaries, and the Great Lakes. The Coastal Shoreline Counties, due to their proximity to these waters, bear the most direct effects of coastal hazards and host the majority of economic production associated with coastal and ocean resources.

When are these statistics most applicable?
Providing context for coastal community resilience, coastal hazards, and other ocean resource-dependent issues.

How to Use this Document
This report offers two independent sections that present basic demographic status and trends information for Coastal Shoreline Counties and for Coastal Watershed Counties, allowing the coastal management community the opportunity to choose the appropriate statistics for their needs.

Appendices A and B provide maps of Coastal Shoreline Counties and Coastal Watershed Counties, respectively. The Coastal Shoreline Counties are a subset of Coastal Watershed Counties, and Appendix C provides a simple comparison between these two groups of counties.

Section 1: People who live in Coastal Shoreline Counties
This section describes basic demographic status and trends of the U.S. population that resides in 452 Coastal Shoreline Counties (see map in Appendix A). These counties are directly adjacent to the open ocean, major estuaries, and the Great Lakes, and due to their proximity to these waters, bear the most direct effects of coastal hazards and host the majority of economic production associated with coastal and ocean resources. This group of coastal residents could generally be considered “the U.S. population most directly affected by the coast.”

When are these statistics most applicable?
Providing context for coastal community resilience, coastal hazards, and other ocean resource-dependent issues.

Section 2: People who live in Coastal Watershed Counties
This section describes basic demographic status and trends of the U.S. population that resides in 769 Coastal Watershed Counties. A substantial portion of the land area of these counties intersect coastal watersheds, and consequently represent where land use changes and water quality impacts can most directly impact coastal ecosystems. This group of coastal residents could generally be considered “the U.S. population that most directly affects the coast.”

When are these statistics most applicable?
Providing context for land use changes in coastal watersheds and local watershed impacts of human activities to coastal and estuarine water quality.

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and the Channel Islands National Park, CA. Credit: Claire Johnson
The Bottom Line

POPULATION DENSITY IS GROWING AT THE COAST

Regardless of how the coast is defined, it is substantially more crowded than the U.S. as a whole, and population density in coastal areas will continue to increase in the future.

Within the limited space of the nation’s coast, population density far exceeds the nation as a whole, and this trend will continue into the future. This situation presents coastal managers with the challenge of protecting both coastal ecosystems from a growing population and protecting a growing population from coastal hazards.

In 2010: Out of the 3 million mi² of land in the US

- <10% comprises Coastal Shoreline Counties
- <20% comprises Coastal Watershed Counties

In 2010: Out of the 313 million people living in the US

- 39% comprise Coastal Shoreline Counties
- 52% comprise Coastal Watershed Counties

In 2010: A small amount of land and a large number of people means high density

- 446 persons/mi² in Coastal Shoreline Counties
- 319 persons/mi² in Coastal Watershed Counties
- 105 persons/mi² in the United States

In Just 40 Years: 1970-2010

- Coastal Shoreline Counties added 125 persons/mi²
- Coastal Watershed Counties added 99 persons/mi²
- United States as a whole added 36 persons/mi²

Note: Land area and density values exclude Alaska. Population values include Alaska and US Territories.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b; NOAA, 2012; Crowell et al., 2010
Coastal Shoreline Counties

123.3 million
Coastal Shoreline County population in 2010.

39%
Percent of the U.S. population that resides in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010.

34.8 million
Coastal Shoreline County population change from 1970 to 2010, a 39% increase.
(U.S. average 52%)

10 million
Projected population change in Coastal Shoreline Counties from 2010 to 2020, an 8% increase.
(U.S. average 10%)

The Bottom Line
In 2010, 123.3 million people, or 39 percent of the nation’s population lived in Coastal Shoreline Counties. Population growth in these counties occurred at a lower rate than the nation as a whole from 1970 to 2010. The population in Coastal Shoreline Counties increased by 34.8 million people, a 39 percent increase, while the nation’s entire population increased by 52 percent over the same time period.
Coastal Shoreline Counties

Population density of Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010 (excluding Alaska).
(U.S. average 105 pers/mi² excluding Alaska)

Projected population density increase in Coastal Shoreline Counties from 2010 to 2020 (excluding Alaska).

89%
Percent increase in the 65 and older population from 1970 to 2010 in Coastal Shoreline Counties. (U.S. average 100%)

-4%
Percent change in persons younger than 18 from 1970 to 2010 in Coastal Shoreline Counties. (U.S. average 6%)
Coastal Shoreline Counties

64%
Share of the U.S. Asian Alone population living in Coastal Shoreline Counties.
(Share of total U.S. Population 39%)

47%
Share of the U.S. Black or African American Alone population living in Coastal Shoreline Counties.
(Share of total U.S. Population 39%)

211%
Percent increase in Hispanic or Latino population from 1980 to 2010 in Coastal Shoreline Counties.
(U.S. average 220%)

The Bottom Line
In 2010, minority population groups residing in Coastal Shoreline Counties represented a combined 35 percent of the Coastal Shoreline County population. This is higher than the combined share of the total U.S. population at 28 percent.

Table 1 | Share of the U.S. Population by Race in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race Category</th>
<th>Percent U.S. Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Alone</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black or African American Alone</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native Alone</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian Alone</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Alone</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some Other Race Alone</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>47%</td>
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Table 2 | Share of the U.S. Population by Hispanic or Latino Origin in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010

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<thead>
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<th>Ethnicity Category</th>
<th>Percent U.S. Population</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>37%</td>
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</table>

Note: U.S. Territories not included. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b; NOAA, 2012; Crowell et al., 2010

Figure 7 | Percent Population of Coastal Shoreline Counties and Inland Counties by Race in 2010

Figure 8 | Percent Population of Coastal Shoreline Counties and Inland Counties by Hispanic or Latino Origin in 2010
Coastal Shoreline Counties

38%
Percent of the population in Coastal Shoreline Counties that hold a higher education degree in 2010 (for those 25 years and over). (U.S. average 35%)

13%
Percent of the population in Coastal Shoreline Counties living below the poverty line in 2010. (U.S. average 13%)

47%
Share of the U.S. households making over $100,000 that are in Coastal Shoreline Counties. (Share of total U.S. Households 39%)

Education Attainment

![Education Attainment Graph]

Figure 9 | Percent Population of Coastal Shoreline Counties and Inland Counties by Education Attainment for Those 25 Years and Over in 2010

Table 3 | Share of the U.S. Population by Education Attainment for Those 25 Years and Over in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Education Attainment Category</th>
<th>Percent U.S. Population</th>
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<td>Total Population</td>
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<tr>
<td>No School Completed</td>
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<td>Some or All Elementary</td>
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<td>Some High School</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
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<td>Associate's Degree</td>
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<td>Professional School Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctorate Degree</td>
<td>46%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Puerto Rico included. Remaining U.S. Territories excluded.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a; NOAA, 2012; Crowell et al., 2010

Household Income

![Household Income Graph]

Figure 10 | Percent Households of Coastal Shoreline Counties and Inland Counties by Income in 2010

Table 4 | Share of the U.S. Households by Household Income in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Category</th>
<th>Percent U.S. Households</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>37%</td>
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<td>$10,000 to $24,999</td>
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<td>$25,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $74,999</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 to $99,999</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $124,999</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>$125,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 +</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: U.S. Territories not included. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b; NOAA, 2012; Crowell et al., 2010
**Coastal Shoreline Counties**

49.4 million
Number of housing units in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010, 39% of the U.S. total.

18%
Percent increase in seasonal housing units in Coastal Shoreline Counties from 2000 to 2010. Total housing units in Coastal Shoreline Counties increased 8%.

42%
Share of all U.S. seasonal homes located in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010.

1355
Number of building permits issued per day in Coastal Shoreline Counties from 2000 to 2010.

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**Seasonal Housing**

**Figure 11 |** Leading States in Number of Seasonal Housing Units in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010

**Figure 12 |** Leading States in Percent of Housing Units that are Seasonal in Coastal Shoreline Counties in 2010

**Building Permits**

**Figure 13 |** Building Permits Issued for Single-Family Units in Coastal Shoreline Counties from 2000 to 2010

**Figure 14 |** Building Permits Issued for Multi-Unit Buildings in Coastal Shoreline Counties from 2000 to 2010

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**Broadkill Beach, DE. Credit: K. Crossett**

**Source:** NOAA, 2012; Crowell et al., 2010

**Note:** U.S. Territories not included.
## Demographic Summary of Aggregated Coastal Shoreline Counties by State

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<th></th>
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<td>Alabama</td>
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<td>California</td>
<td>25,520,252</td>
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<td>716</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>111</td>
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<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>2,219,037</td>
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<td>980</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>Delaware</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>District of Columbia</td>
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<td>9,864</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Louisiana</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Maine</td>
<td>836,502</td>
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<td>97</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Maryland</td>
<td>4,148,642</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Massachusetts</td>
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<td>1,400</td>
<td>4</td>
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Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b; NOAA, 2012; Crowell et al., 2010
Coastal Watershed Counties

163.8 million
Coastal Watershed County population in 2010.

52%
Percent of the U.S. population that resides in the Coastal Watershed Counties in 2010.

50.9 million
Population change in Coastal Watershed Counties from 1970 to 2010, a 45% increase. (U.S. average 52%)

15 million
Projected population change in Coastal Watershed Counties from 2010 to 2020, a 9% increase. (U.S. average 10%)

The Bottom Line
In 2010, 163.8 million people, or 52 percent of the nation’s population lived in Coastal Watershed Counties. Population growth in these counties occurred at a lower rate than the nation as a whole from 1970 to 2010. The population in Coastal Watershed Counties increased by 50.9 million people, a 45 percent increase, while the nation’s entire population increased by 52 percent over the same time period.
Coastal Watershed Counties

Population Density

Figure 17 | Population Density Change in Coastal Watershed Counties and Inland Counties from 1970 to 2020

- Coastal Watershed Counties
- Inland Counties

- 319 pers/mi\(^2\)
  - Population density of Coastal Watershed Counties in 2010 (excluding Alaska).
  - (U.S. average 105 pers/mi\(^2\) excluding Alaska)

- 24 pers/mi\(^2\)
  - Projected population density increase in Coastal Watershed Counties from 2010 to 2020 (excluding Alaska).

- 97%
  - Percent increase in the 65 and older population from 1970 to 2010 in Coastal Watershed Counties. (U.S. average 100%)

- 0%
  - Percent change in persons younger than 18 from 1970 to 2010 in Coastal Watershed Counties. (U.S. average 6%)

The Bottom Line

In 2010, 52 percent of the U.S. population lived in Coastal Watershed Counties (less than 20 percent of the total land area excluding Alaska). The population density of Coastal Watershed Counties is over five times greater than the corresponding inland counties, a trend that has been consistent since 1970.

Note: Density values include U.S. Territories and exclude Alaska.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; NOAA, 2012

Age

Figure 18 | Percent Population Change of Coastal Watershed Counties and Inland Counties by Age from 1970 to 2010

- Coastal Watershed Counties
- Inland Counties

- 11%
  - Percent population change of Coastal Watershed Counties and Inland Counties by age from 1970 to 2010.

- The Bottom Line

In 2010, age distribution within Coastal Watershed Counties and inland counties differed only slightly and the share of the U.S. population living in Coastal Watershed Counties by age category was consistent with the share of total population. However, from 1970 to 2010, the growth rate among the age categories differed substantially, demonstrating an aging population in both Coastal Watershed Counties and inland counties, with inland counties growing faster within each age category.

Note: U.S. Territories not included.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b; NOAA, 2012
Coastal Watershed Counties

75%
Share of the U.S. Asian Alone population living in Coastal Watershed Counties.
(Share of total U.S. Population 52%)

59%
Share of the U.S. Black or African American Alone population living in Coastal Watershed Counties.
(Share of total U.S. Population 52%)

239%
Percent increase in the Hispanic or Latino population from 1980 to 2010 in Coastal Watershed Counties.
(U.S. average 220%)

The Bottom Line
In 2010, minority population groups residing in Coastal Watershed Counties represented a combined 33 percent of the Coastal Watershed County population. This is higher than the combined share of the total U.S. population at 28 percent.
### Coastal Watershed Counties

#### Education Attainment

- **37%**
  - Percent of the population in Coastal Watershed Counties that hold a higher education degree in 2010 (for those 25 years and over).  
  - (U.S. average 35%)

- **13%**
  - Percent of the population in Coastal Watershed Counties living below the poverty line in 2010.  
  - (U.S. average 13%)

- **60%**
  - Share of the U.S. households making over $100,000 that are in Coastal Watershed Counties.  
  - (Share of total U.S. Households 52%)

#### Household Income

- **Table 8** | Share of the U.S. Population by Education Attainment for Those 25 Years and Over in Coastal Watershed Counties in 2010
  - | Education Attainment Category | Percent U.S. Population |
  - | Total Population | 52% |
  - | No School Completed | 61% |
  - | Some or All Elementary | 56% |
  - | Some High School | 52% |
  - | High School Graduate | 50% |
  - | Some College | 51% |
  - | Associate’s Degree | 53% |
  - | Bachelor’s Degree | 56% |
  - | Master’s Degree | 59% |
  - | Professional School Degree | 61% |
  - | Doctorate Degree | 59% |

- **Table 9** | Share of the U.S. Households by Household Income in Coastal Watershed Counties in 2010
  - | Income Category | Percent U.S. Households |
  - | Total Households | 52% |
  - | Less than $10,000 | 48% |
  - | $10,000 to $19,999 | 47% |
  - | $20,000 to $44,999 | 48% |
  - | $25,000 to $74,999 | 50% |
  - | $75,000 to $99,999 | 53% |
  - | $100,000 to $124,999 | 56% |
  - | $125,000 to $149,999 | 59% |
  - | $150,000 + | 64% |

**Note:** Puerto Rico included. Remaining U.S. Territories excluded.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a; NOAA, 2012

**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b; NOAA, 2012
Coastal Watershed Counties

65.2 million

Number of housing units in Coastal Watershed Counties in 2010, 51% of the U.S. total.

16%

Percent increase in seasonal housing units in Coastal Watershed Counties from 2000 to 2010. Total housing units in Coastal Watershed Counties increased 9%.

55%

Share of all U.S. seasonal homes located in Coastal Watershed Counties in 2010.

1876

Number of building permits issued per day in Coastal Watershed Counties from 2000 through 2010.

Mystic Seaport, CT. Credit: J. O’Grady
## Demographic Summary of Aggregated Coastal Watershed Counties by State

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a; NOAA, 2012
Acknowledgements

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Mark Crowell

References


Appendix A: Coastal Shoreline Counties

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has derived 452 Coastal Shoreline Counties. FEMA's 100-year flood plain, or Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), delineates where the National Flood Insurance Program’s floodplain management regulations must be enforced and the area where the mandatory purchase of flood insurance applies. The Coastal Shoreline Counties are counties that have a coastline bordering the open ocean, or contain FEMA identified coastal high hazard areas in the SFHA (Crowell et al., 2010). American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico are included in this suite (Ache et al., 2012).

For more detailed information about Coastal Shoreline Counties visit: http://coastsocioeconomics.noaa.gov/coast_defined.html.
NOAA’s National Coastal Population Report

Appendix B: Coastal Watershed Counties

NOAA has derived 769 Coastal Watershed Counties. A county is considered a Coastal Watershed County if one of the following criteria is met: (1) at a minimum, 15 percent of the county’s total land area is located within a coastal watershed; or (2) a portion of a county, or an entire county, accounts for at least 15 percent of a coastal USGS 8-digit cataloging unit. This “15-percent rule” intends to identify counties that have a substantial watershed-based impact on coastal and ocean resources. In addition, the five U.S. Territories – American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, are included in their entirety (Ache et al., 2012).

For more detailed information about the Coastal Watershed Counties visit: http://coastalsocioeconomics.noaa.gov/coast_defined.html.
Appendix C: Comparing Coastal Shoreline and Coastal Watershed Counties

Coastal Shoreline Counties are contained entirely within the inland extent of Coastal Watershed Counties, making up 53 percent of the total land area of Coastal Watershed Counties. However, Coastal Shoreline Counties exhibit a much higher population density than Coastal Watershed Counties, as they contain 75 percent of the total population in this area.

Average Density
- Coastal Watershed Counties: 319 pers/mi²
- Coastal Shoreline Counties: 446 pers/mi²

Note: Land area and density numbers exclude Alaska. Population values include Alaska.