

Introduction

One of the major functions of the Ocean County Planning Department is to provide demographic information to municipalities, consultants, educational institutions and the general public. The *Ocean County Data Book* is intended as a reference document for frequently requested statistical information on Ocean County. The most current information from the U.S. Census, the New Jersey Department of Labor and many other sources have been included in this report. Planning staff will continue to update the online *Data Book* between printings as additional data becomes available. The online book can be accessed via: **www.planning.co.ocean.nj.us/frmDMDataBook**



Planning, Engineering, & Roads Annex,
Toms River, NJ

Additional maps and publications covering a wide range of planning issues are also available, as well as current and historic aerial photographs. To determine the availability of more specific information included in this report, or to obtain any additional information or products, please direct all inquiries to:

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Overview of Ocean County

Ocean County is located within the Atlantic Coastal Plain of central New Jersey. In terms of size, the County is the second largest in the State and one of four New Jersey counties which border the Atlantic Ocean. Toms River Township, formerly Dover Township, serves as the County Seat and is centrally located within Ocean County. The County is in close proximity to two of the Nation's largest metropolitan centers, New York City, approximately 60 miles to the north and Philadelphia, roughly 50 miles to the west. In addition, Atlantic City is located approximately 50 miles to the south of the County Seat. These metropolitan areas are easily accessible to Ocean County via several major highways, as shown on the Regional Location Map (page xiv).

Although Ocean County was settled during colonial times, its presence as a separate political entity is of relatively recent origin. The County was created from lands divided from Monmouth County in 1850. For much of its early history, the County was a



Barnegat Lighthouse with Keeper House (1917)

rural, agricultural and fishing center. During the latter part of the 1800's and through the 900's, the resort industry of the New Jersey Shore was developed, and the commercial activities associated with seasonal resorts quickly became the County's economic mainstay.

In the early 1950's, there began a nationwide trend towards suburbanization as people moved outward from the older urban centers into previously sparsely populated or rural areas. The opening of the Garden State Parkway in 1954 permitted access to a large amount of undeveloped and inexpensive land within commuting distance of the labor markets in New York and northern New Jersey. The County also became a desired location for people who wanted to retire away from the more industrial areas to the north.

Although the County was primarily rural with a population of 37,675 in 1940, by 2010 the County's Census population topped one-half million, at 576,567. As evidenced by each of the decennial censuses during the 70-year period from 1940 to 2000, Ocean County had the greatest growth rate by far in the State from 1940-1990 and the second greatest from 2000-2010. Almost all of this growth was due to immigration, rather than the natural increase of the population. Ocean County's population increased to 637,229 in Census 2020, and then estimated to be 666,434 in 2024, per the Annual Census Population Estimate.

Development in Ocean County has traditionally occurred along the coastal beaches and in the corridor formed by the Garden State Parkway and US Route 9. Major interchanges along the Garden State Parkway have encouraged development along east-west corridors, such as County Routes 526 and 528, State Highway 37 and State Highway 72. Interstate 195, completed in 1983, is a relatively new highway, which plays an increasing role in the development of the northern portion of the County. The Interstate provides direct access to the major employment areas of Trenton (the State Capital) to the west and Monmouth County to the northeast.

With the growing year-round population, Ocean County's economic base has become increasingly diverse, with a variety of industries now supplementing traditional tourist-related businesses and employment expanding to meet the increasing demands for goods and services created by a growing population.

Ocean County's strongest employment sectors are the Health Care and Social Assistance (40,456 jobs), Retail Trade (26,958), Accommodation and Food Services (18,145) and Construction (11,004), according to the 2023 Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Report. According to the employment projections released by the NJ Department of Labor, Ocean County is projected to have the third fastest employment growth rate of counties in the state, at 7.1% and adding 14,350 jobs from 2022 to 2032. In comparison, the State is projected to increase employment by 4.8% in the same time period.

Ocean County is also home to the nation's only tri-service joint base, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. Active-duty, reserve and guard service members from the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard ensure total force integration by training, supporting and sustaining installation and global contingency operations. Together, they are uniquely capable of projecting air, land and sea power in support of our nation's defense. The JB MDL spans more than 20 miles east to west, equaling 42,000 contiguous acres in Ocean and Burlington Counties. It is the largest employer in southern New Jersey and the second largest employer in the State of New Jersey, with over 42,000 employees.



U.S. Air Force photo, used with permission.

Despite the large growth in population and employment, Ocean County maintains a vast amount of protected open space, which will ensure the balanced land use of the area in the future. Much of the area west of the Garden State Parkway contains large tracts of State Parks, Forest and Wildlife Management Areas. In addition, about 24,575 acres east of the Parkway are protected under the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. The Barnegat Bay and Little Egg Harbor, which stretch nearly the entire north-south length of the County, were recently added to the US National Estuary Program and will be the subject of continuing environmental protection efforts.



Downs Property, preserved by the Natural Lands Trust Fund Program, Plumsted, NJ

In 1997, the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders (currently Board of Commissioners) established the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund Program to acquire lands in the County for conservation and farmland preservation. Through June 2025, about 30,135 total acres of productive farmland and environmentally-sensitive natural lands had been preserved through the Natural Lands Trust Fund and Farmland Preservation Programs.

The Ocean County Parks Department also maintains an active capital program for parkland acquisition and development to ensure that a variety of recreation opportunities are in close proximity to residents throughout Ocean County. As always, the coastal beaches of Ocean County are foremost among the County's attractions and continue to draw thousands of seasonal visitors to the area each year.

More detailed information on all the topics noted within this Overview is included in the *Ocean County Data Book*.