

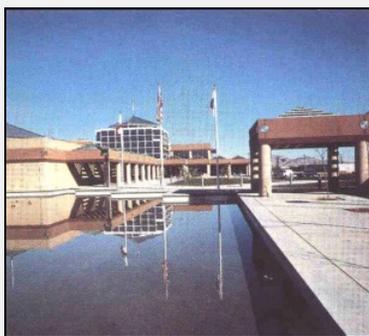
2

RIDGECREST – AN OVERVIEW

2.1 Ridgecrest's History



Tent housing in Ridgecrest, 1940's
Source: www.high-desert-memories.com



Today, Ridgecrest Community Center
Source: www.high-desert-memories.com

The Indian Wells Valley area that is now Ridgecrest was at the time of contact part of the territory used by the Kawaiisu Indians. The Kawaiisu homeland, however, was located to the west in the Tehachapi and Piute Mountain regions. Travel into the area was mainly for the seasonal collection of plants and animals not available in the mountains. The Kawaiisu excelled at basket making and used them for harvesting, food preparation and storage.

The first non-Native people to enter the general area were a group of American beaver trappers led by Jedediah Smith in 1826. In 1834, explorer Joseph Walker led an expedition through the area, and in 1849 the Death Valley Party traveled through the region on their way to California. Between the 1860s and 1890s, the surrounding region experienced several mining booms which resulted in increased travel and transportation through the Indian Wells Valley. In the 1880s, Chinese railroad laborers briefly settled in Indian Valley following their employment by the Central Pacific Railroad in the Owens Valley, hence the source of the name "China Lake." It wasn't until the early twentieth century, however, that there was a permanent non-native presence in the valley. The construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct between 1908 and 1913, as well as the subsequent arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad, encouraged the creation of several farming communities within Indian Wells Valley.

In the early 1910s, Robert and James Crum settled in the area, running a dairy. By late 1912, the small community that developed around the dairy was known as Crumville. Agricultural interests in the valley failed to achieve great success, and until the 1940s the area was predominantly occupied by a few farming families and mining interests. Early settlers included Grant Bowman, who in 1913 came to the area and developed his 160 acre Las Flores Ranch, Joe Fox and his wife who came to Ridgecrest in 1934, eventually donating property for various churches, schools and clubs, as well as the former USO building, and Bill Bentham and his family who arrived in Ridgecrest in 1939 and acted as the first postmaster in 1941. It was in 1941 that Ridgecrest received its official name by a community vote. The community originally wanted to be named “Sierra View,” but it was overturned by the postal authorities because there were too many “Sierras” in California. The community voted on a new name. Ada Thompson suggested the name Ridgecrest, which won by a single vote over the name “Gilmore.”

In 1943 the Naval Ordnance Testing Station (NOTS) was established at the Inyokern Airport, then called Harvey Field. Following the end of World War II, Harvey Field was deactivated and NOTS aviation operations were transferred to the new Armitage Field at China Lake. Thousands of construction workers, military men and their families settled in the area between the mid to late 1940s, causing a housing boom in the area. In 1943, Ridgecrest had grown to 15 homes and 96 residents. By the 1950s, the population of Ridgecrest exceeded 5000. This population boom led to the development of numerous businesses and facilities, including the Ridgecrest Community Hospital. In 1963 the City of Ridgecrest incorporated. Through the following decades, the City was highly impacted by the changes in NOTS, later China Lake Naval Weapons Center (NWC) and now the Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) China Lake.

Today, the City still shares an integral symbiotic role with China Lake, providing housing, and community services for the installation.

2.2 Government

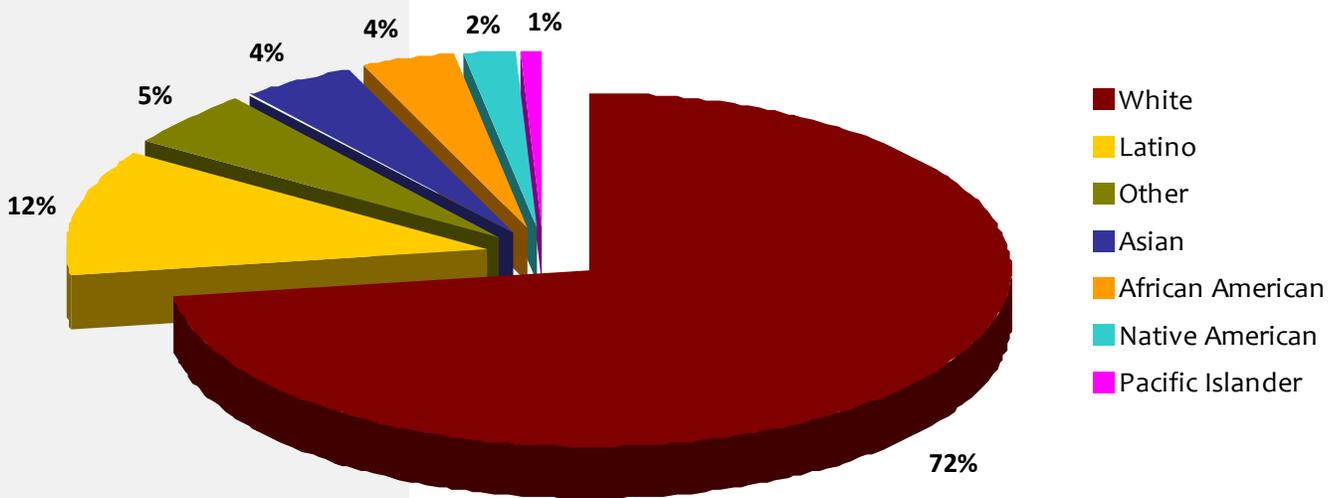
The City of Ridgecrest was incorporated in 1963 and operates under a Manager / Council form of government. The City Council representatives are elected through citywide elections for four year terms. The City Manager is the administrative head of the City government under the direction and oversight of the City Council. Duties of the Manager include: enforcing laws and regulations; providing direction to department heads and employees; preparing rules and regulations; conducting studies; keeping the Council advised on City financial conditions; and assisting in the preparation of the annual City budget to Council for approval. The Council may delegate other duties to the Manager as well.

The Community Development Department is responsible for current and long range planning, zoning administration, code enforcement and building permit activity. This department is also responsible for the administration and maintenance of the General Plan.

2.3 Demographics

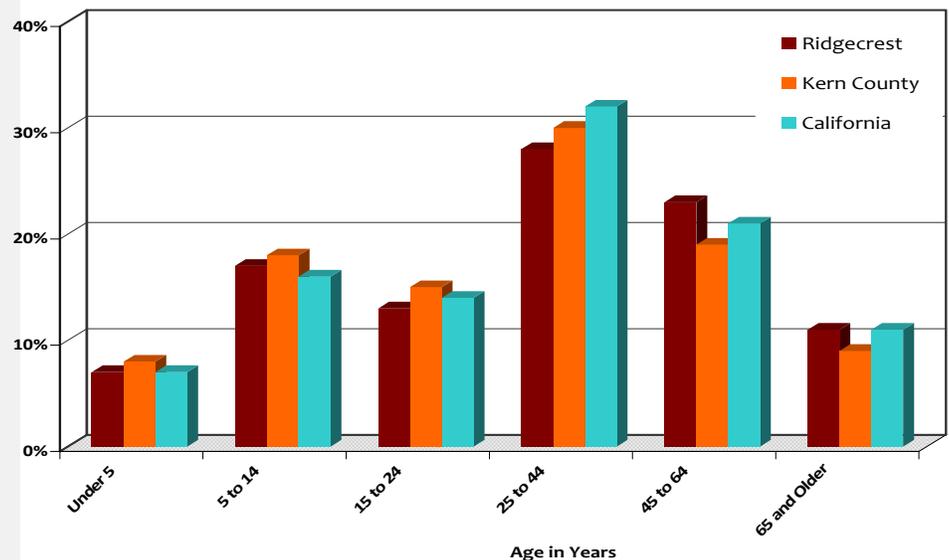
The City’s racial demographic is nearly three-quarters White; 12 percent Latino; 5 percent other races; 4 percent Asian; 4 percent African American; 2 percent Native American; and less than 1 percent Pacific Islander (see Figure 2-1). Age distribution is marked with most of the population being 25 to 44 years of age, followed closely by those aged 45 to 64. The population percentage for all age distributions can be seen in Figure 2-2.

Figure 2-1. Racial Demographics



Source: U.S. Census, 2000

Figure 2-2. Age Distribution



Source: U.S. Census, 2000

2.4 Education

The Ridgecrest area is served by the Sierra Sands Unified School District which consists of 10 schools in the Planning Area: two high school, two middle schools, five elementary schools, and one continuation school. Although all schools are located within the City's Planning Area, several facilities are located outside the city limits on the NAWS China Lake installation.

According to the California Department of Education (2007), the City has a 93.5 percent high school graduation rate, compared to 86 percent for Kern County and 85 percent for the State of California. Additionally, over 37 percent of the population has four or more years of college education.

Cerro Coso Community College was established in 1973 as a separate college within the Kern Community College District. Cerro Coso has five instructional sites (Eastern Sierra Center Bishop, Eastern Sierra Center Mammoth, Indian Wells Valley, Kern River Valley, and South Kern), which together form the largest geographical service area (18,000 square miles) of any community college in California. Together these locations serve a population of approximately 85,000. The Cerro Coso Community College has an enrollment of about 24,000 students throughout its five locations.

2.5 Economic Base

The City of Ridgecrest is fast becoming the regional retail center for Eastern Kern County with the introduction of several new, big-box retailers and its position as the largest community in the eastern County. With an increase in retail sales of 12.2% in 2005, Ridgecrest is well-positioned to continue its retail expansion. In addition to the added retail, economic indicators have greatly improved in the last couple of years.

Ridgecrest's workforce currently has an approximate two to one ratio of white collar (managerial/professional) jobs to blue collar (industrial/service) jobs, respectively (GAVEA Economic Roundtable, 2007). With the possible future expansion of employment at NAWS China Lake, growth in research and development professional occupations as well as support/ service jobs are possible.

China Lake

Annual payroll for military and civilians at China Lake, as well as the installation's expenditures in the area have significant impacts on the surrounding cities and region as a whole. The annual payroll in 2007 for personnel at China Lake was \$432 million. Over 91 percent of the total payroll was to civilians. Annual contract expenditures totaled \$531 million.

EMPLOYMENT

The Navy is the largest employer in the Indian Wells Valley, providing a significant economic thrust for the Valley and adding to the economic base of surrounding communities. China Lake provides direct employment for 767 military personnel and 3,388 civilians. Additionally, the installation provides employment for over 2,400 contract civilians, located both on the installation and off site. Direct employment at the installation is more than the combined total of the other nine employers that make up the top ten in the City (see Table 2-2). In addition to being the largest employer in the area, the spin off employment from visitors, contractors, and supply purchases is significant.

Table 2-2. Top Ten Employers of the City of Ridgecrest

Employer	Type of Business	Number of Employees
Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, and Tenant Commands	Defense Research & Development	Civilian: 3,388 Contractor: 2,434 Military: 767
Seales Valley Minerals	Mining of Soda Ash Products	625
Sierra Sands Unified School District	Education	620
Ridgecrest Regional Hospital	Acute-Care Hospital	340
Wyle Laboratories	Defense Contractor	280
AltaOne Federal Credit Union	Credit Union	215
SA-Tech (Systems Applications & Technologies)	Defense Contractor	187
Wal-Mart	Discount Department Store	185
Cerro Coso Community College	Education	175
Desert Area Resources and Training	Training and Social Service	142

Source: <http://ci.ridgecrest.ca.us>, 2008

China Lake data provided by installation, September 2007

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ridgecrest's household median income of \$44,971 is just below the State of California median of \$47,493. Offering economic balance between income and cost of living, median home values within the City are also lower than State and Kern County values, as seen in Table 2-3. According to the City of Ridgecrest and Kern Economic Development Corporation, building permits soared from less than \$5 Million annually throughout the 1990's to over \$33 Million alone in 2006, showing a significant investment in real estate development for the City of Ridgecrest in recent years.

Table 2-3. Median Home Values

	Median Home Value		Value Change	Percent Change
	2000	2005		
California	\$211,500	\$477,700	\$266,200	126%
Kern County	\$93,300	\$224,079	\$130,779	140%
City of Ridgecrest	\$72,400	\$163,500	\$91,100	126%

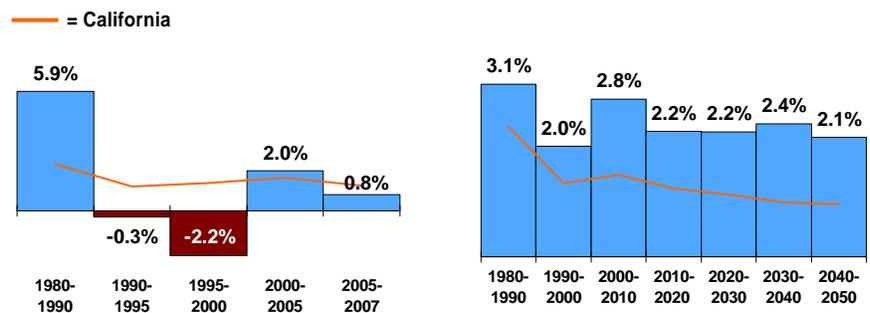
Source: www.census.gov, 2008

2.6 Growth Trends

Based on 2007 data, the City of Ridgecrest has experienced a population decrease of just over one percent since the 1990 Census. Between 1990 and 2000, the city experienced a population decrease of over 10 percent; however, the subsequent five years showed an increase of nearly 6 percent (1,401 people). Population in the community is strongly linked to changes in employment at NAWS China Lake.

As shown on Figure 2-3 and in Tables 2-4 and 2-5, Ridgecrest has been growing at a rate slower than Kern County as a whole, though 2006 showed increasing growth potential. In 2006, the City approved lots for 1,766 dwelling units. By comparison, only 540 units were approved between 2002 and 2005. From 2001 to 2006, the City grew at one percent annually and the County grew at three percent annually. Using a range of potential growth rates, the City’s 2030 population could be: 33,667 (at a one percent annual growth increase); 42,648 (at a two percent annual growth increase); or 53,900 (at a 3 percent annual growth increase).

Figure 2-3. Population Growth Comparisons – City, County, and State



Ridgecrest Population Growth

Source: California Department of Finance, 2007

Kern County Population Growth

Table 2-4. Population Profile

	City of Ridgecrest	Kern County
2001 Population	25,232	673,634
2002 Population	25,598	690,570
2003 Population	25,858	710,005
2004 Population	26,154	733,376
2005 Population	26,666	757,882
2006 Population	26,515	779,869
Population Increase	6.4%	17.9%

Source: California Department of Finance, 2007

Table 2-5. Housing Profile

	City of Ridgecrest	Kern County
2001 Housing	11,310	234,059
2002 Housing	11,313	237,650
2003 Housing	11,342	242,231
2004 Housing	11,382	247,918
2005 Housing	11,419	254,417
2006 Housing	11,529	262,934
Housing Increase	1.9%	13.5%

Source: California Department of Finance, 2007

2.7 Regional Transportation

The City of Ridgecrest is serviced by two major highways - Highways 14 and 395 as well as the Highway 178 Scenic Corridor. Regional transit service is provided by the Inyo-Mono County bus service, which connects Ridgecrest with California City and Mohave.

There are five regional airports, the closest being Inyokern Airport located 10 miles west of the City. Other airports include Trona Airport (20 miles), California City Municipal Airport (41 miles), Ontario International Airport (124 miles), and Burbank Airport (143 miles).

2.8 Culture and Local Attractions

Ridgecrest is abundant with cultural and recreation activities. Within and around the City, there are five museums, seven cultural venues, ten local recreation parks, and several nearby national parks and attractions.



Manurango Museum
Source: www.maturango.org



Cerro Coso Community College main building in winter
Source: www.aiage.org, 2008



Freedom Park, Ridgecrest
Source: City of Ridgecrest, 2008

MUSEUMS

- Desert Tortoise Natural Area
- Historic Rand Mining District
- Maturango Museum
- Naval Museum of Armament and Technology

CULTURAL VENUES AND EVENTS

- Cerro Coso Community College
- Community Light Opera and Theatre Association
- Desert Community Orchestra Association
- Four Winds Inter-Tribal Pow Wow
- Indian Wells Valley Concert Association
- Maturango Museum
- Rand Mining District
- Ridgecrest Cinemas

LOCAL PARKS

- Freedom Park
- Helmers Park
- James M. Pearson Memorial Park
- Kerr McGee Community Center
- Kerr McGee Youth Sports Complex
- Leroy Jackson Park Sports Complex

- Moyer Park
- Ridgecrest Senior Center
- Ridgecrest Skate Park
- Sgt. John Pinney Memorial Pool
- Upjohn Park

NATIONAL PARKS AND ATTRACTIONS IN THE REGION

- Death Valley National Park
- Dove Springs OHV Area
- Fossil Falls
- Inyo National Forest
- Jawbone Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Area and Visitor Center
- Kennedy Meadows
- Owens Peak Wilderness
- Petroglyphs
- Rademacher Hills Trail System
- Red Rock Canyon State Park
- Robbers Roost
- Sequoia National Forest
- Short Canyon
- Spangler OHV Area
- Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark



Death Valley National Park
Source: www.britannica.com, 2008

2.9 Climate



Sunny Skies

The Indian Wells Valley has an average of 260 cloud-free days a year, making it an excellent location for aircraft operations and enjoying the sunshine.

The climate in Ridgecrest is generally hot during the day and cool at night. The City's location in the high desert allows cooler temperatures to prevail after the sun goes down. Extreme conditions arise during summer months with maximum temperatures closer to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) with very little rain. Monthly precipitation stays below 1 inch. The mean annual temperature for the City is 65 °F, and fluctuations range from 0 °F to 118 °F. Table 2-1 shows monthly average temperatures for the nearby China Lake Armitage climate center site.

Table 2-1. Monthly Climate Summary from 1971 to 2000

Average	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
Max Temperature (°F)	59.9	61.1	91.5	78.5	87.3	97.0	100.6	99.0	92.5	80.4	60.3	54.9	80.5
Min Temperature (°F)	32.3	34.3	39.6	47.7	55.0	63.2	67.2	64.7	58.2	46.1	30.0	24.5	47.0
Total Precipitation (in)	0.86	0.95	0.71	0.20	0.13	0.03	0.09	0.35	0.21	0.11	0.29	0.55	4.48

Source: Western Regional Climate Center, 2008