

Sex offenders a concern in Del Norte County

October 8, 2021

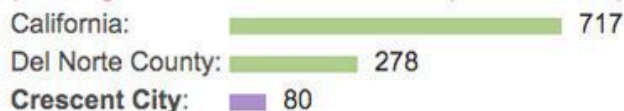
Crescent City, CA ratio of number of residents to the number of sex offenders compared to nearest cities:

(Note: Higher values mean more residents per sex offender)



Crescent City, CA ratio of number of residents to the number of sex offenders compared to county and state:

(Note: Higher values mean more residents per sex offender)



In a place where local police officers make the effort to handcuff rogue shopping carts to patrol cars to return them to grocery stores, it's hard to imagine that what lies beneath the fog of this quaint shoreline town are some alarming sex offender statistics.

According to City-Data.com, for every 80 persons who live in Crescent City, there is one sex offender. That's 88 registered sex offenders or 1.3% of the population.

That's well above nearby Brookings, which is located in Curry County, Oregon. Brookings has a similar population size but has a ratio of one sex offender for every 3,284 people living in the community. Or in simpler terms, Brookings has two registered sex offenders.

In Humboldt County, Calif. - where the towns of Fortuna and Eureka are located - the resident to sex offender ratios are 402 to 1, and 173 to 1, respectively.

On its website, City-Data.com states that it derives its information from official public records, but added this caveat: "It is possible that the information displayed here does not reflect the current residence or other information."

Indeed, even the Megan website, which is governed by the California Attorney General's office, may be less than perfect.

California Penal Code 290, also known as Megan's Law, states that any person convicted of certain sex crimes must register as a sex offender. That is to say that not all sex crimes require sex offender registration, and some require shorter registration periods than others.

It's also the responsibility of sex offenders to register on the site every year within five days of their birthday, or whenever they move. But not every sex offender meets these requirements, resulting in an ominous red marker above their name.

The data, then, could be further skewed. For example, the Megan site pulls up six individuals within the immediate downtown area of Crescent City, each of whom is in "violation" of the above-stated stipulations. So, it's hard to know for sure if they still live in the area.

Regardless, whether perusing the City-Data or Megan platforms, one theme was consistent: Crescent City has more sex offenders in its jurisdiction than any other in the region.

"I would agree, our number is high," said Crescent City Chief of Police Richard Griffin.

Griffin added that prior to joining the Crescent City Police Department in 2019, and while he was a detective for the Del Norte Sheriff's Department, he had noticed this was an issue. At least anecdotally.

"I've always thought to myself that it was high, but I have not had a chance to look into the why," Griffin said.

Some registered sex offenders, as part of their conditioned parole, are required to agree to life-long GPS (Global Positioning System) monitoring, as well as live a certain distance away from schools or parks.

The latter requirement is less common than it used to be due to constitutional limitations, and according to Griffin, none of the Crescent City residents listed on the Megan site are required to do so, though he did say one of the individuals is not allowed to possess a cell phone or peruse the internet.

City Manager Eric Wier, who has been working hard to clean up the town's image not just because it's his job, but as he pointed out - because he, too, is raising a family here - was curious about the reasons behind the numbers.

"It is a good question and data is one thing, but we have to get to the reasons behind the data and see what we can do to address what the cause is," Wier said.

"It's hard when you're dealing with such a small population where a few of these numbers can really add up to a large percentage ratio," Wier added. "Because just like with any sort of statistics your sample size does matter. Though the data is still very much concerning and something we should look into more."

While the duo was equally stumped, Griffin pondered whether being a coastal community that people pass through may have something to do with it.

"We do have what appears to be a larger transient population," Griffin said. "I'm not saying they are all sex offenders. Just that what comes through the area, some people stay because they like it."

Griffin's assumptions may be rooted in trends noticed elsewhere in the country, though the draw appears to be more about affordable real estate than a location's aesthetics.

In a 2019 article in the Colorado Sun, Mary Evans, an associate professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Northern Colorado, noted that unequal distribution of sex offenders is especially prevalent in low-income neighborhoods.

Crescent City trails behind its counterparts in that area too and has a poverty rate of nearly 27%. That's almost 18% higher than Brookings and about 7% higher than Eureka.

However, just as sex offender numbers are approximations, persons who have committed sex crimes - particularly against children - that doesn't automatically imply they are a danger to the community.

According to the California Attorney General's Office website, over 90% of child victims know their offender, with almost half of the offenders being a family member. Of sexual assaults against people age 12 and over, approximately 80% of the victims know the offender, the site further states.

"But, we have to deal with it no matter what," Griffin said.

The Triplicate researched and compared sex offender statistics in Del Norte and Humboldt Counties following the Sept. 22 arrest of Raymond Bocock. Bocock lives just outside Crescent City but within Del Norte County, near Del Norte High School.

Bocock is facing multiple charges that include forcible rape and penetration with a foreign object of two females, including one victim who is currently 12 years old, and another who is now an adult but was under the age of 14 when the crimes allegedly occurred.

Bocock is being held on a \$1 million bond and Public Defender Karen Olson was appointed by Judge Robert Cochran to represent him. On Oct. 1, Cochran approved two restraining orders for the alleged victims, and on Oct. 4, Bocock pled not guilty to all charges. The matter is slated for a readiness hearing on October 18, and a preliminary hearing on October 19.

The Triplicate sat down with Chief Griffin and City Manager Wier last week to discuss public safety and economic development, including adding officers and potentially a detective to the department, as well as business recruitment, redevelopment of the city's downtown retail corridor, and housing needs. Stories about those conversations will occur in future issues of The Triplicate, including the addition of two new pickup trucks which will be used, albeit in small part, to deal with the shopping cart matter mentioned at the top of the story.