

## 4.4.1 Northern Alaska

### Communities

[Elim](#)

[Nome](#)

[Prudhoe Bay](#)

[Shaktoolik](#)

[Unalakleet](#)

### Geographic Location

The Northern Alaska sub-region includes three areas: the Nome Census Area, North Slope Borough, and the Northwest Arctic Borough. These three areas together make-up 147,716 square miles of land area, but are extremely sparsely populated. All but one of the profiled communities belonging to this sub-region in this document is located in the Nome Census Area, which makes up 23,001 square miles of land. The communities in the Nome Census Area are located for the most part on the Norton Sound. The Census Area reaches to the borders of Russia to the west, 66.25667 °N Lat to the north, and approximately 62.77778 °N Lat to the south. The Nome Census Area is also known as the Bering Strait Region. One of the communities, Prudhoe Bay, is located in the North Slope Borough which makes up 88,817.1 square miles of land and 5,945.5 square miles of water. Prudhoe Bay is located on the Beaufort Sea. The North Slope Borough is at approximately 69 °N Lat and -154 ° W Long and spans across the entire top of the State of Alaska. It makes up over 15% of the total land area of Alaska.

### Weather

The weather in the Nome Census Area of Northern Alaska is for the most part sub-arctic. It ranges in temperature in the summer from about the mid-40s to mid-60s. During the winter the temperature ranges from approximately -12 °F to 11 °F, depending on the community. Precipitation ranges from about 8-18 inches with 33-56 inches of snowfall. Norton Sound is usually free of ice from the months of May to October and the Chukchi Sea to the north is typically ice-free from about mid-June to mid-November. The weather in the North Slope Borough is arctic with extreme temperatures ranging from -56 °F to 78 °F. Precipitation is about 5 inches per year in the North Slope; however, snowfall averages at about 20 inches.

### General Characterization

There are no areas which are considered to be metropolitan in the Nome locale; however, the city of Nome is the center for supplies, transportation, and services and its population makes up roughly half the population of the entire Census Area which included a total of 9,196 persons in 2000. The other cities and villages ranged in population from 21 to 747 inhabitants. Most communities are reachable by both air and sea and have runway facilities for air travel and docking facilities for vessels.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census there were a total of 7,385 inhabitants of the North Slope Borough, with a very mobile population of about 5,000 oil field workers who rotate through different sites in the State and to different states as well. Communities in the North Slope are reachable year-round by air, with land providing only seasonal access to the communities.

A large percentage of Northern Alaskans were Alaska Native or American Indian. In the Nome area, as well as the North Slope Borough, this was as high as 74%. The Nome area was historically occupied by Inupiaq peoples, but also by Yupik and Athabascan, such as in the Unalakleet area. Traditional livelihoods, such as subsistence practices, remain very important to inhabitants. In the North Slope Borough area it was historically occupied by Inupiaq peoples, however with oil exploration and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline persons originating from all over the world have come to the area for employment.

The economies of the profiled communities in the Nome area are very heavily dependent upon subsistence harvests. Even in cities that provide wage earning opportunities, subsistence activities remain prevalent. The opportunities for employment were mostly in commercial fishing. A processor was present in Nome as well as one in Unalakleet. A

buying station was located in Elim. Residents also held government employment in Elim, Nome, and Unalakleet. Mining, oil, and tourism also provided employment in Nome. In 2000, the Census Area had an annual unemployment rate of 12.3%; however, some of the smaller communities held a much higher rate. The poverty rate was quite high for the area as well, with 17.4% of the population living below the poverty level.

The economy for the North Slope area is based on oil operations. The Borough government is funded by these oil tax revenues. Subsistence activities are prevalent in the North Slope. No one lived below the poverty level in the community of Prudhoe Bay; however, 9.1% of the population of the Borough lived below the poverty level.

### **Institutional Framework**

The communities profiled in the Nome Census Area of Northern Alaska were not part of any organized borough. All were incorporated cities with “strong mayor” forms of government, which included city councils. All profiled communities had their own Traditional Council as well as a Native Village Corporation. The Regional Native Corporation in which the communities of the Bering Strait Region are included is the Bering Straits Native Corporation (BSNC). The BSNC is a for-profit Native corporation created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) which owns land and is entitled to the subsurface rights of that land, as well as holding patent or interim conveyance to the subsurface land of much of the village corporations. The BSNC has quite a few subsidiaries operating various businesses including a real estate holdings company (which also owns a hotel), a gold mining company, an electrical construction business, a car rental business, and various other businesses.

The regional non-profit organization for those communities in the Nome Census Area is Kawerak, Inc. which has “programs ranging from education to housing, and natural resource management to economic development. Kawerak seeks to improve the region’s social, economic, educational, cultural, and political conditions” (Kawerak, Inc. 2001). The community development quota (CDQ) organization for the area, the Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDC), includes 15 communities and represents the largest population of all the CDQs.

The NSEDC is given a percentage of the harvests of certain species and uses the revenue generated from such for community development and various programs including scholarships for education as well as community outreach. The NSEDC also operates Norton Sound Seafood Products (NSSP) in order to provide seafood processors who will purchase the fish of the area. There are three NSSP processors in the Norton Sound area.

For the North Slope Borough communities the situation is quite different. The communities are all part of a borough which provides services such as a school district, however most of the facilities are provided by the oil industry. As in the case of Prudhoe Bay, some communities are unincorporated, but it appears for the most part that communities in the borough are incorporated. Prudhoe Bay was not included in ANSCA and thus did not have either a Native regional corporation or Native village corporation. There also was not a local traditional council for the village which was federally recognized. The regional non-profit organization in which the community is included is the Arctic Slope Association.

### **Commercial, Sport, and Subsistence Fisheries**

Every community profiled in this section participated in the commercial fishing sector in some substantial way: either as having permit holders, crew members, or a processor. The most important fisheries in regard to the amount of permit holders for the area appear to be salmon, king crab, and herring. Halibut was also fished. Quite a few of the permits issued for salmon were not fished in 2000 (over half were not fished in some communities), perhaps because of the recent falling salmon prices attributed to competition with foreign aquaculture fish. Both Nome and Unalakleet have Norton Sound Seafood Products (NSSP) processors in operation. A NSSP buying station is present in Elim. Only one permit was issued in the community of Prudhoe Bay; however, since this one resident accounted for more than 15% of the population the community was profiled even though other indicators of a fishing community were not present.

Sport fishing did not seem to be much of a major industry in the profiled communities in comparison to other areas in Alaska. About 1,728 sport fishing licenses were sold in the profiled communities. Over 70% of those licenses were sold to Alaska residents,

which may show that little revenue is being generated by sport fishing in the area by tourists. Over 70% of the licenses were also sold in the city of Nome. There were five sport fishing guide businesses in Nome and one which was located in Unalakleet.

Subsistence harvesting is very important to members of the region and is a large component of the economy. Little has been reported by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in regard to total subsistence harvests and species harvested for this area, however evidence of its importance is shown in the daily wild food harvest totals for the communities which are at the high end of the spectrum of subsistence in Alaska, ranging from 1.7 to 1.85 lbs per person per day for the smaller communities. Those residents of Nome harvested approximately 0.658 lbs per person per day which is much less than the smaller communities, but still shows that subsistence is being utilized. There was no specific subsistence information available from ADF&G for the community of Prudhoe Bay in the North Slope Census Area; however, subsistence is important to permanent residents who participate in marine mammal hunts and other activities.

## Regional Challenges

The Bering Strait Region has had its share of challenges including those associated with the rural character of the region affecting the prices of goods and cost of living for the area. There are few jobs available in some of the communities and the per capita income is comparatively low for the state. Education levels are also low, and poverty rates are relatively high. The dependence upon salmon fisheries has become a serious problem during the recent falling salmon prices. Many communities in the area were awarded compensation by the federal government in salmon disaster funds in order to help to replace funds which were lost in salmon taxes which provided basic services for many communities.

Challenges in the North Slope would most likely be the fact that most facilities in a community such as Prudhoe Bay are provided by the private oil industry companies.