

North Pacific

■ Alaska



North Pacific Summary

Regional Context

The North Pacific region includes only the state of Alaska. The state's coastline is 6,640 miles; its tidal shoreline is enormous at 33,904 miles, more than 2.8 times longer than the next longest regional tidal shoreline. Fishing communities can be found along most of the subarctic parts of Alaska's coastline and some of its tidal shoreline. Commercially important communities occur adjacent to the Gulf of Alaska from the Canadian border, north to the end of the Alaskan Peninsula on Kodiak Island and on some of the islands in the Aleutian chain and the Pribilof Islands, and along Bristol Bay on the Bering Sea. Located in the high northern latitudes, Alaska is characterized by short summers and long, dark, cold winters, creating rigorous, often dangerous fishing conditions for its fishermen. Important species sought by commercial fishermen include pollock, mackerel, cod, herring, salmon, crab, and groundfish species such as rockfish, sablefish and halibut.

Communities that are heavily involved in processing as well as commercial harvesting activities attract large temporary populations of workers, including many Asians and Hispanics, from outside the region. In these communities, temporary workers sometimes outnumber permanent residents, and in some places are housed in group quarters during the fishing season, for example, Akutan (90% of the population) and Sand Point (36% of the population). This is a regionally unique feature.

Native Americans comprise 80-90% of the population in some remote areas of Alaska. They continue to fish, hunt sea mammals, and gather other marine resources as part of their annual round of subsistence activities. Native Americans have continuously inhabited the region for at least 12,000 years, closely tied to the marine environment since their arrival. Major coastal cultural-linguistic groups include Inupiaq, Yupik, Aleut, Alutiiq, Tlingit, and Haida. Even communities in the interior of Alaska are tied to the marine environment by dependence on anadromous fish (for example, salmon) that spend part of their lives in the ocean and then return to inland watersheds to spawn.

Recreational fishing has also become economically important in Southeast and South Central Alaska. Many remote Alaska communities are also dependent on subsistence fisheries and the harvest of marine mammals.

The Fishing Communities

The Alaskan region is unique in the number and proportion of communities that are involved in, and dependent on, commercial fishing to earn their livelihoods. Overall, 136 fishing communities have been profiled by NMFS social scientists because of the nature of their links with commercial and/or recreational fishing. In 2006, eleven



A fisherman mends his nets at St. Paul Harbor, Alaska

of the United States' top fifty ports by pounds landed were located in Alaska. By order of ranking, they are: Dutch Harbor/Unalaska (1); Kodiak (4); Naknek-King Solomon (12); Petersburg (17); Ketchikan (18); Sitka (19); Cordova (21); Seward (25); Juneau (39); Homer (44); and Kenai (49). On average, from 1997-2006, Alaska accounted for 53% of U.S. landings and 32% of landings revenue.

Alaska has the smallest population (626,932 in 2000) among the nation's coastal states. Alaska's fishing communities also have small populations ranging from fewer than 100 to only a few thousand for even major fishing communities. The ten top commercial fishing communities have an average population of 3,620 ranging from the smallest, Akutan at 713, to Sitka, the largest at 8,835. Sitka is also Alaska's 5th largest city.

Community, Resiliency, Growth, Marine Health and Well Being

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 9.2% of families in the U.S. live below the poverty line, the median income level is \$42,000, and 18% of residents over five years of age speak a language other than English at home. The state of Alaska has a lower percentage of families living in poverty (6.7%), a higher median income level (\$52,000), and a lower number of residents older than five who speak a language other than English at home (14.3%) than the rest of the U.S. More information on these and other factors that may affect community resiliency are discussed below.

Alaska's top fishing communities generally have family household poverty rates below the national average. The lone exceptions are Dillingham and Sand Point with poverty rates of 10%.¹ The percentage of residents over five

¹Note that in contrast to its top fishing communities, many of Alaska's other fishing communities have relatively high poverty rates. (See Sepez et al. for additional information.)

Fishing Communities Facts

- Alaska communities are small. Ninety-nine percent of Alaska’s communities have fewer than 12,000 residents; 65% have less than 400 residents.

Fishing activities

- The isolated Aleutian outpost of Dutch Harbor/Unalaska (pop. 4,283) is the nation’s busiest fishing port by volume of landings.
- The pollock fishery is the largest in the U.S. Though pursued by a relatively small fleet, including about 21 large catcher/processor vessels and 133 catcher vessels, it comprises about 58% of landings in Alaska.
- Commercial fishing communities with shoreside processing plants tend to have a higher proportion of males in the population than the state. For example, Akutan (77% male), Dutch Harbor/Unalaska (66% male), and Sand Point (62% male) all have higher proportions of males than the state as a whole (52%).
- Many non-Alaskans participate in commercial fisheries in the state. Many of these participants come from Washington and Oregon.
- Seaford, VA and Pleasantville, NJ are home to the majority of the permit holders for the specialized Alaskan scallop fishery.
- Each year, more than 15,000 people from all over the world buy an Alaska Commercial Fishing Vessel Crewmember license.
- The number of crew has declined since 1993 when about 32,000 held crew licenses. In 2006, 18,498 crew licenses were sold.
- Almost half a million people buy sport fishing licenses in Alaska each year, catching over three million fish. Halibut and salmon are the most popular species.

Subsistence activities

- Alaskans harvest a lot of food from the wild and 65% of this harvest is fish. On average, each person harvests 22 pounds of food each year from the wild. Alaskans in rural areas average 375 pounds per year.

Native Alaskans

- Sixty-five Alaska Native villages along the Bering Sea belong to a Community Development Quota (CDQ) Program that have been allocated 10% of the harvest from several different Bering Sea fisheries.
- Marine mammals, including bowhead whales and several seal species, are important food sources for Alaska Natives in many coastal communities.

Historical context

- Several World War II battles were fought on Alaska’s fishing grounds. While the United States fought the Japanese in the Aleutian Islands, the entire Native population in the archipelago was forcibly removed to internment camps.
- The community of Adak, once a large military base in the Aleutian Islands, is currently being redeveloped by the Aleut Corporation as a fishing community.

Harbor/Unalaska (42%), Kodiak, (42%), King Cove (37%), and Sand Point (36%).

Another factor potentially affecting community resiliency is the relative isolation of Alaska’s fishing communities. Most of Alaska’s fishing communities are reached only by sea or air; no roads connect them to other communities. Weather conditions can make sea and air travel unreliable. This means that these communities can be very isolated. It also means that many foodstuffs and other commercial goods including fuel must be shipped in, raising their local cost. Further, many basic services including medical care are more difficult to access.

The state population grew 8.2% from 1997-2006. The number of building permits issued grew 7% and the unemployment rate declined 8.5% for this period. From 2005-2006, the number of building permits issued decreased 5.1%. There were 12 disaster declarations during the 1997-2006 time period and no emergency declarations.

List of Fishing Communities & Ports

The following list contains fishing communities and ports that have been identified by NMFS social science staff as having ties to commercial and/or recreational fisheries in the North Pacific region. Profiles of these fishing communities can be found in *Community Profiles for North Pacific Fisheries – Alaska*, currently available at <http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/Publications/techmemos.htm>. For the other states, see *Community Profiles for West Coast and North Pacific Fisheries – Washington, Oregon, California, and Other U.S. States*, currently available at <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/publications/displayallinfo.cfm?docmetadataid=6718>.

Alaska

- Adak
- Akhiok
- Akiachak
- Akutan
- Aleknagik
- Alitak Bay
- Anchor Point
- Anchorage
- Angoon
- Atka
- Auke Bay
- Bethel
- Chefornak
- Chignik (Bay)
- Chignik Lagoon
- Chignik Lake
- Chugiak
- Clam Gulch
- Clarks Point

- Cordova
- Craig
- Dillingham
- Douglas
- Dutch Harbor/Unalaska
- Eagle River
- Edna Bay
- Eek
- Egegik
- Ekuk
- Ekwok
- Elfin Cover
- Elim
- Emmonak
- Excursion Inlet
- Fairbanks
- False Pass
- Fritz Creek
- Galena
- Girdwood
- Goodnews Bay

years of age who spoke a language other than English was 14% for the state. In contrast, the percentage of residents who spoke a language other than English at home was more than twice the national rate in Akutan (66%), Dutch

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Gustavus
Haines
Halibut Cove
Hobart Bay
Homer
Hoonah
Hooper Bay
Hydaburg
Igiugig
Iliamna
Ivanof Bay
Juneau
Kake
Karluk
Kasilof
Kenai
Ketchikan
King Cove
King Salmon
Kipnuk
Klawock
Kodiak
Kokhanok
Koliagnek
Kongiganak
Kotlik
Kwigillingok
Larsen Bay
Levelock
Manokotak
Marshall
Mekoryuk
Metlakatla
Meyers Chuck
Naknek
Napakiak
Nelson Lagoon
New Stuyahok
Newhalen
Newtok
Nightmute
Nikiski
Nikolaevsk
Ninilchik
Nome
Old Harbor
Ouzinkie
Palmer
Pedro Bay
Pelican
Perryville
Petersburg
Pilot Point
Pilot Station
Platinum

Point Baker
Port Alexander
Port Alsworth
Port Graham
Port Heiden
Port Lions
Port Moller
Port Protection
Portage Creek
Prudhoe Bay
Quinhagak
Saint George
Saint Marys
Saint Paul
Sand Point
Scammon Bay
Seldovia
Seward
Shaktoolik
Sitka
Skwentna
Soldotna
South Naknek
Sterling
Tenakee Springs
Thorne Bay
Togiak
Toksook Bay
Tuntutuliak
Tununak
Twin Hills
Ugashik
Unalakleet
Valdez
Ward Cove
Wasilla
Whale Pass
Whittier
Willow
Wrangell
Yakutat

Washington

Anacortes
Bellingham
Bothell
Cathlamet
Chinook
Edmonds
Everett
Lakewood
Seattle
Silvana
Woodinville

Oregon

Astoria
Newport
Sisters

New Jersey

Pleasantville

Virginia

Seaford