

4.1.1 Southeast Alaska

Communities

[Angoon](#)

[Craig](#)

[Edna Bay](#)

[Elfin Cove](#)

[Excursion Inlet](#)

[Gustavus](#)

[Haines](#)

[Hobart Bay](#)

[Hoonah](#)

[Hydaburg](#)

[Juneau*](#)

[Kake](#)

[Ketchikan**](#)

[Klawock](#)

[Metlakatla](#)

[Meyers Chuck](#)

[Pelican](#)

[Petersburg](#)

[Point Baker](#)

[Port Alexander](#)

[Port Protection](#)

[Sitka](#)

[Tenakee Springs](#)

[Thorne Bay](#)

[Whale Pass](#)

[Wrangell](#)

[Yakutat](#)

* Includes Juneau City and Borough, plus Douglas and Auke Bay.

** Includes Ward Cove.

Geographic Location

Southeast Alaska includes five boroughs (Yakutat, Ketchikan, Haines, Sitka, and Juneau) and three census areas (Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon, Wrangell-Petersburg, and Prince of Wales-Outer Ketchikan). The region trails in a thin coastal strip offland from Yakutat in the northwest (59.547° N Lat.) to Prince of Wales in the southeast (55.208° N Lat.), and borders the Canadian province of British Columbia and the Yukon Territory.

Weather

Spectacular amounts of precipitation are the hallmark of weather in Southeast Alaska. The region is in the maritime climate zone, which is characterized by mild, wet weather. With some exceptions, many communities receive well over 120 inches (10 feet) of rain annually. The northern portion of the region also receives heavy snowfall. In the summer, average temperatures range from 50 to 65°, and average winter temperatures range from 29 to 40°. Much of Southeast Alaska lies within the vast Tongass National Forest, a coastal rain forest characterized by spruce and hemlock.

General Characterization

Southeast Alaska, for much of human history, has been a meeting place for different cultures. Most of Southeast Alaska is Tlingit territory; the southern part of the region also is the territory of Tsimshian and Haida, other coastal Native groups. The population of the southeast boomed in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when White settlers followed the rise in

resource extraction and commercial fishing.

Today, Southeast Alaska has approximately 73,000 residents, most of whom are concentrated in the region's larger cities of Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan. Approximately 60% of the region's residents are White.

Juneau, the state capital, has a population of 30,000 and a good share of the economic activity of the region. The backbone of the regional economy is commercial fishing. Major commercial fleets are based in the large ports of Sitka, Yakutat, Wrangell, and Ketchikan, but even smaller communities have sizable fleets. In addition, many communities have commercial fish processing plants and storage facilities. The timber industry also constitutes an important part of the regional economy. A growing tourist industry, bolstered by increasing cruise ship stopovers, is becoming an important source of revenue; approximately half a million tourists visit Southeast Alaska by cruise ship annually.

In general, the economy of Southeast Alaska is well developed in comparison to other regions in Alaska, owing to its proximity to the lower 48 states and its history of commercial fishing and resource extraction. Per capita income is around \$23,000 and the average household income is around \$50,000. The unemployment rate is approximately 7%, and the poverty rate is approximately 9%.

Institutional Framework

Southeast Alaska includes five boroughs (Yakutat,

Ketchikan, Haines, Sitka, and Juneau) and three census areas (Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon, Wrangell-Petersburg, and Prince of Wales-Outer Ketchikan). As a result of this organizational structure, many communities located in census areas rather than boroughs are responsible for administrative tasks such as tax collection and the provision of services. A notable administrative anomaly in the region is Metlakatla, a Tsimshian Indian reservation located on the 86,000 acre Annette Island. This land is the only federal reservation for indigenous peoples in Alaska, since other groups acquired land entitlements through Native Corporations during the Alaska Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971.

Another unique aspect of Southeast Alaska's institutional framework is the Tongass National Forest, the largest in the Nation, which covers much of the region and comes with federally mandated regulations governing resource extraction and conservation.

Despite the low proportion of Alaska Natives in the southeast relative to other regions Native governing bodies are an important and powerful part of regional government. The Sealaska Corporation, a regional for-profit Native Corporation organized under ANCSA, is the largest private landowner in Southeast Alaska. Alaska Natives in many communities also belong to the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Tribes of Alaska, the regional non-profit Native Corporation. In addition, many communities also have Native village councils and village corporations.

Commercial, Sport, and Subsistence Fisheries

Fishing has long been the backbone of the regional economy in Southeast Alaska; in fact, the rise and fall of the region's population has been correlated with the economic cycles of commercial fishing. Commercial fishing, in particular, accounts for a good portion of the regional economy. Major commercial species include all five species of Pacific salmon, halibut, herring, groundfish, crab, and other shellfish.

The larger ports in Southeast Alaska—including Yakutat, Juneau, Sitka, Wrangell, Petersburg, and Ketchikan—serve as hubs in the regional commercial fishing sector. These ports account for thousands of registered crew members, thousands of commercial permit holders, and hundreds of vessels. In addition, they act as processing centers for the majority of fish caught in the region. Commercial fish landings at these ports amounted to over 100,000 tons in 2000,

and were comprised overwhelmingly of salmon. The dozens of smaller communities in Southeast Alaska are by no means left out of the commercial fishing picture. They account for a significant share of the region's registered crew members, vessel owners, and permit holders. In addition, many small communities have commercial fish processing plants or small-scale processing and storage facilities.

Sport fishing is also a vital part of the regional economy in Southeast Alaska, and one that is growing in importance. Fishermen come from all over Alaska, as well as Canada, the lower 48 states, and around the world to fish the productive waters in the area. Major sport species include all five species of Pacific salmon, Pacific halibut, trout, steelhead, and char. In 2000, more than 100,000 sport fishing licenses were sold in Southeast Alaska.

In addition, most communities in the region participate to some degree in subsistence fishing. Smaller communities, and those with a higher proportion of Alaska Native residents, tend to rely more heavily on subsistence resources. Actual subsistence harvests vary widely, from an average of 34 lbs per capita in Juneau to nearly 400 lbs per capita in Yakutat. Salmon, and particularly sockeye salmon, is the most widely used subsistence resource. Other resources commonly used for subsistence include Pacific halibut (for communities holding a Subsistence Halibut Registration Certificate), shellfish, rockfish, and marine mammals.

Regional Challenges

The particular challenges that face Southeast Alaska are, to a large extent, the result of the region's heavy reliance on natural resources. The first challenge is posed by changing patterns of timber harvesting and timber management. Most timber harvesting takes place on land held either by the Tongass National Forest or by Sealaska, the regional Native Corporation. In both places, the abundance of cheap timber from international markets has caused a decline in local harvesting and a loss of jobs.

The other major challenge, and perhaps a greater one, is the decline in salmon prices caused by foreign competition. Many communities and boroughs have received federal salmon disaster funds to compensate for the financial stress created by the declining salmon market.