

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 GEOGRAPHY

#### 2.1.1 Regions

The Alaska Department of Community, Commerce and Development's Division of Community and Region Affairs (DCRA) provides the Alaska Regions map depicting how Alaska is divided into eight distinct regions based upon variations in climate, terrain, and economics (Figure 2-1).

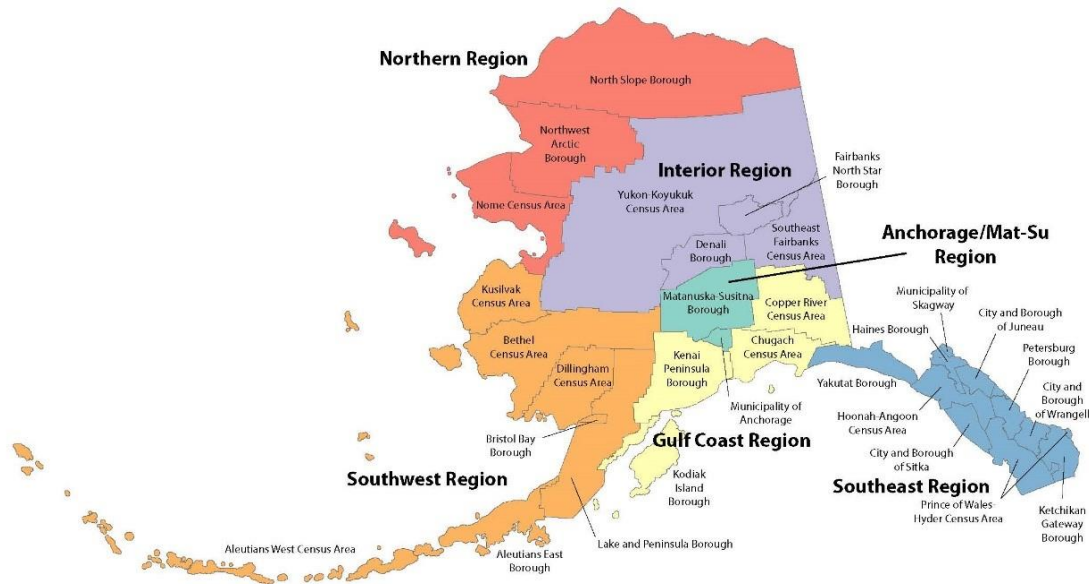


Figure 2-1: Alaska Regions Map

Source: Division of Community and Region Affairs

The state is also divided into six economic regions: Northern, Interior, Southwest, Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna, Gulf Coast and Southeast. Figure 2-2 depicts the economic regions in Alaska.

## Alaska Economic Regions



**Figure 2-2: Alaska Economic Regions**

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section.  
<https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/cen/maps/state/current/EconRegions.pdf>

### 2.1.2 Land Ownership

With 656,425 square miles, Alaska is the largest state in the U.S. by land area, and is approximately one-fifth the area of the lower, contiguous 48 states. There are roughly 1.3 people per square mile in Alaska compared to the national average of 93 people per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau 2021).

Nearly 90 percent of the land in Alaska is publicly owned, including both federal and state land ownership. Approximately 65 percent of Alaska is owned and managed by the U.S. Federal government as public lands, including national forests, national parks, and national wildlife refuges. The State of Alaska owns 24.5 percent of the land. Ten percent of the land in Alaska is owned by 12 regional Native corporations and dozens of local Native corporations created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). Less than 1% of the land is owned privately. (State of Alaska 2023).

### 2.1.3 Cities, Towns and Boroughs

The State of Alaska's constitution establishes a policy of maximum self-government for its citizens. Its 19 existing boroughs are not the equivalent of county governments in the emergency management context. Emergency services in Alaska are provided by independent regional service areas throughout the state. Some boroughs and municipalities have government-run emergency management systems similar to county-style agencies, while most boroughs have area-wide powers focusing on education, land-use planning, and tax assessment/collection. The boroughs cover approximately 38 percent of the land mass and encompass most of the state's population. The rest of the population resides in a vast, sparsely inhabited rural area called the Unorganized Borough. The state's Unorganized Borough is not politically subdivided and is managed by the Alaska Legislature in accordance with the Alaska State Constitution, Article 10, Subparagraph 6.

Alaska is also divided into Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAA); school attendance areas located in Alaska's Unorganized Borough. The borough and REAA grouping enables the state to effectively identify government responsibilities and define locational disaster impacts when requesting federal disaster declarations.

### Population and Area

Table 2-1 depicts the 2022 populations and land areas of the six economic regions broken down by boroughs and census areas.

**Table 2-1: 2022 Alaska Population Statistics by Borough, Census Area and Economic Region**

Area	Population	Area (sq. mi.)
<b>Alaska</b>	<b>736,556</b>	<b>656,425</b>
<b>Anchorage/Mat-Su Region</b>		
Anchorage, Municipality of	289,810	1,706.80
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	111,752	24,706.97
<b>Gulf Coast Region</b>		
Kenai Peninsula Borough	60,017	16,017.42
Kodiak Island Borough	12,832	6,688.86
Chugach Census Area	7,013	9,530
Copper River Census Area	2,619	24,692
<b>Interior Region</b>		
Denali Borough	1,645	12,641
Fairbanks North Star Borough	96,747	7,334.81
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	7,046	24,831.06
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	5,150	145,575.55
<b>Northern Region</b>		
Nome Census Area	9,682	22,969.46
North Slope Borough	10,746	88,823.63
Northwest Arctic Borough	7,346	35,663.28
<b>Southeast Region</b>		
Haines Borough	2,575	2,343.39
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	2,349	6,555.26
Juneau, City and Borough of	32,202	2,704.03
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	13,762	4,856.93
Petersburg Borough	3,357	2,900.65
Prince of Wales - Hyder Census Area	5,720	5,267.73
Sitka, City and Borough of	8,350	2,870.06
Skagway, Municipality of	1,146	433.93
Wrangell, City and Borough of	2,084	2,556
Yakutat, City and Borough of	673	7,623.28
<b>Southwest Region</b>		
Aleutians East Borough	3,685	6,985.23
Aleutians West Census Area	5,003	4,393.03

Bethel Census Area	18,207	40,627.14
Bristol Bay Borough	800	481.98
Dillingham Census Area	4,673	18,333.99
Kusilvak Census Area	8,158	17,077.06
Lake and Peninsula Borough	1,407	32,922

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

### 2.1.4 Alaska Native Regional Corporations

The State of Alaska has 229 federally recognized tribes. Federally recognized tribes possess certain inherent rights of self-government. ANCSA extinguished aboriginal land titles and mandated the creation of private, for-profit corporations owned by Alaska Native shareholders. Tribes located in Alaska do not have a land base. Through ANCSA, Alaska Native corporations hold title to roughly 44 million acres of land held through private corporate ownership.

Alaska Native regional corporations are owned by over 140,000 Alaska Native shareholders and hold title to nearly 27 million acres of land across Alaska. Alaska Native regional corporations manage the land for the benefit of their shareholders. There are currently 12 operating Alaska Native regional corporations ([https://www.akrdc.org/alaska-native-corporations#Corp\\_Profiles](https://www.akrdc.org/alaska-native-corporations#Corp_Profiles)):

- Ahtna, Incorporated
- Aleut Corporation
- Arctic Slope Regional Corporation
- Bering Straits Native Corporation
- Bristol Bay Native Corporation
- Calista Corporation
- Chugach Alaska Corporation
- Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated
- Doyon, Limited
- Koniag, Incorporated
- NANA Regional Corporation
- Sealaska Corporation

### 2.1.5 Climate

Extremely diverse geography has a significant effect on Alaska's climate. Alaska's climate falls into five major zones:

- **Maritime zone** which includes southeast Alaska, the south coast and southern islands. This zone is characterized by cool summers, mild winters, and heavy rain throughout the year.
- **Maritime continental zone** which includes the western portions of Bristol Bay and west-central zones. Summer temperatures in this zone are moderated by the open waters of the Bering Sea but temperatures in winter are more continental in nature due to the presence of sea ice in the coldest months of the year.
- **Transition zones** are between maritime and continental zones in the southern portion of the Copper River zone, Cook Inlet zone, and the northern extremes of the south coast zone. These zones are characterized by semi-arid atmosphere, long, cold winters and mild summers.
- **Continental zones** make up the remainders of the Copper River and west central divisions and the interior basin. These zones are characterized by extreme temperature differences. This climate zone encompasses most of the central part of the state and is characterized by extremely cold winters and warm summers.
- **Arctic zone** is characterized by seasonal extremes in temperatures. Winters are long and harsh and summers are short but warm. Temperatures can range from 60 degrees below zero Fahrenheit to 78 degrees Fahrenheit.

## 2.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

Alaska’s 2022 population estimate is 736,556 with a median age estimated as 36.5 years old. Table 2-2 depicts the demographics of Alaska.

**Table 2-2: Alaska Population Demographics**

Race and Hispanic Origin	Estimated Population (percent)
White Alone	64.5
Black or African American alone	3.6
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	15.7
Asian alone	6.6
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander alone	1.6
Hispanic or Latino	7.5

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2023.

## 2.3 ECONOMY

Alaska’s economy is driven by the oil and gas, tourism, fishing, timber, mining, and agricultural industries.

Oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay, located on the arctic coast, in 1968. Construction of the 800-mile Trans-Alaska Pipeline began in 1974 and was completed in 1977. The pipeline is the largest privately financed construction project in history. The oil and gas industry is the largest component of Alaska’s economy with nearly 85 percent of the state budget supplied by oil revenues.

Alaska contains half of the nation’s coal reserves and its largest silver and zinc mines. Gold in Alaska’s streams and mountains still lures miners to work private claims.

Tourism is a major sector of Alaska’s economy and is the second largest primary employer. Alaska attracts over 1.1 million visitors annually.

Rich fishing waters off the coasts of Alaska make it one of the world’s finest sources for wild seafood. Each year, Alaska harvests approximately 6 billion pounds of seafood. Alaska is the number one producer of wild salmon in the world and has the only salmon industry certified as “sustainable” by the Marine Stewardship Council.

Forests in Alaska provide renewable economic resources. Alaska contains 28 million acres of commercial forests. Alaska’s timber industry supplies the world with logs, lumber, pulp, and other forest products. Southeast Alaska contains the Tongass National Forest, a 16.8-million-acre rainforest. The Chugach National Forest is the nation’s second largest National Forest with 4.8 million acres.

About 15 million acres of land in Alaska are considered suitable for farming. Alaska currently has 1 million acres in production. Long daylight hours in summer provide growing conditions for vegetables of extraordinary size.