



ALASKA ECONOMIC
TRENDS

FEBRUARY 2017

**UPS AND DOWNS FOR
OIL INDUSTRY JOBS**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Hoonah, Southeast's largest Tlingit community

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

ALASKA ECONOMIC TRENDS

FEBRUARY 2017

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ON THE COVER: The Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline, near Fairbanks. Photo by Flickr user Skip Nyegard
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We're ensuring Alaska remains the best place to work



Heidi Drygas
Commissioner

We're in the midst of the legislative session here in Juneau, so my days are packed with meetings and our staff is working around the clock to analyze bills, respond to information requests, and take care of everything else that session entails. As we analyze legislative proposals and continue cutting our own budget, it's important to step back once in a while and put this work in the context of our department's mission and priorities.

When you boil it down, we have a simple and, I think, honorable mission: to sustain and improve working conditions for Alaskans. But it gets complicated pretty quickly. We help unemployed Alaskans get trained and find jobs. We work with employers to expand training programs. We enforce labor, safety, and workers' compensation laws for Alaska's workers. We run focused training programs to help veterans and people with disabilities develop skills to find good middle-class jobs.

That's a lot of programs. So how do we measure success? Here are a few ways to look at it:

- If you are injured on the job in Alaska, workers' compensation should pay for medical treatment and rehabilitation so you can go back to work.
- If you're laid off, your unemployment insurance benefits should tide you over until you can find a new job. And if your industry is in decline, our training programs may help you learn new skills in an industry with more job openings.

- If you aren't paid for all the hours you've worked, including overtime, our Wage and Hour staff should help you recover those lost or stolen wages.
- If you want to advance your career, you should have options such as registered apprenticeships to improve your skills, earn new credentials, and improve your economic security.

These are not easy goals to meet. Across the country and in this state, medical costs are skyrocketing, creating challenges for workers' compensation programs. A growing number of companies are misclassifying their employees as independent contractors, which means workers don't receive unemployment insurance benefits when they're laid off and aren't protected by workers' compensation if they're injured on the job. Too many employees' wages, including for overtime, are stolen.

Workers generally don't have powerful lobbyists. In a democracy, they should have the state on their side. That's why we're here — to make Alaska the best possible place to work. A recent study found that Alaska has the lowest income inequality in America, which means we have more equal opportunity in our state compared to others.

Job security may be eroding elsewhere in our country and in the world, but we should work to protect economic opportunity and security here. That's the mission of our department, and I am proud that our department's employees are so dedicated to that mission.



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UPS AND DOWNS

for oil industry jobs

Periods of job loss and where the industry stood at its 2015 peak

By NEAL FRIED

The decline in oil prices over the last couple of years led to major job losses for the oil and gas industry in Alaska in 2016. As of June, the industry's employment had fallen to 11,100 after reaching a record monthly average of 14,100 in 2015. (See the sidebar on page 8 for more about annual versus monthly numbers.)

Fluctuation is nothing new for Alaska oil industry employment, which has waxed and waned for decades. (See Exhibit 1.)

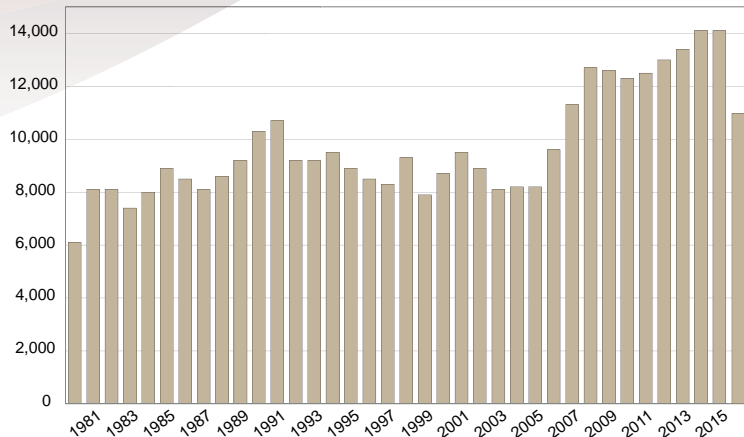
Prior to the most recent job loss, the industry had been on a decade-long growth trend — and that was preceded by a 15-year decline. Unlike the current contraction, however, Alaska's total job count continued to grow during those years.

The history since production peaked

The state's oil production peaked in 1988, and the

1 Volatile Decades for Oil Employment

ALASKA, 1980 TO 2015



Note: 2016 is preliminary.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

industry reached a high of 10,700 jobs in 1991. It wouldn't break that 10,000 barrier again until 2006, though. With an extended period of low oil prices, the industry lost 2,200 jobs between 1991 and 1997.

That overall decline from 1990 to 2005 was marked by a few brief periods of recovery. In 1998, for example, development of a number of new fields boosted employment, but prices plunged the fol-

lowing year and for the first time since 1983, industry employment fell below 8,000.

Then in 2001, employment spiked, reaching a 10-year high with the development of the Alpine and North Star oil fields before falling that same year and hovering at the 8,000 level again through 2004.

By that point, Alaska’s oil industry appeared to be entering a permanent era of stagnation or enduring decline. But four years of above-average oil prices — which by 2005 were more than double the 2001 low — breathed new life into the industry, which began to grow again with work on West Sak, maintenance in Prudhoe Bay, and continued development of a number of satellite fields. In early 2006, a section of BP’s pipeline sprung a leak, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars spent on repairs.

Record oil prices also ushered in a long list of new players and new projects, such as Pioneer Natural Resources and ENI’s Oooguruk and Nikaitchuq offshore prospects. Other major players fueled further activity and growth, including big investments by

ConocoPhillips, Shell’s massive offshore drilling efforts, and Exxon’s Point Thompson undertaking to ship gas condensate. Relative newcomers such as Hilcorp led a big upswing in activity in Alaska’s oldest oil and gas province, Cook Inlet.

That new work, along with continued maintenance, redevelopment of existing oil and gas fields, and exploration, contributed to record growth. By 2007, oil industry employment topped the 11,000 mark, which was the first in a series of employment records over the next seven years.

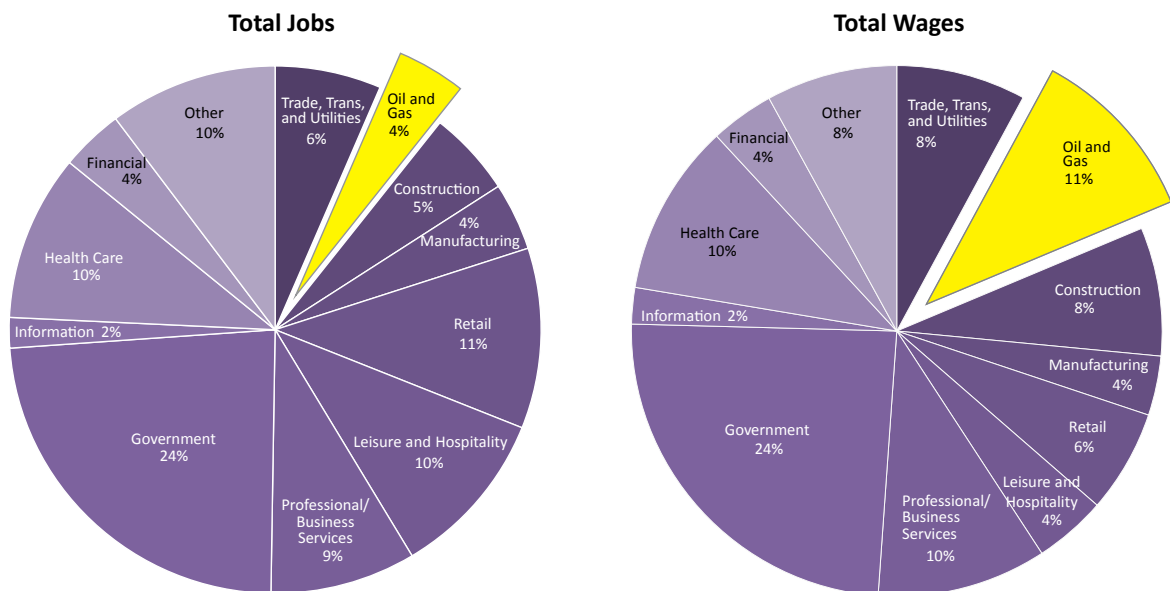
The industry broke the 12,000 jobs barrier the following year, then peaked at 14,100 in 2014 and 2015. It was a remarkable run, especially considering production was just a quarter of what it had been in 1988.

The exhibits on the following pages further illustrate this history and provide a snapshot of the industry and wages in Alaska at its most recent peak in 2015.

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2 Oil Industry a Small Slice of Jobs, Bigger Share of Wages

ALASKA’S INDUSTRY MIX, 2015



Note: Residents only
 Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Direct oil industry jobs represented 4 percent of all wage and salary employment for Alaska residents in 2015. Oil is a relatively small employer, but it carries a big punch. Because average earnings in the oil industry are more than two-and-a-half times the overall average, they represented 11 percent of the state’s total wages in 2015, at \$2 billion. The industry’s growth was so robust between 2005 and 2015 that its total wages grew by 123 percent in contrast to the 50 percent wage growth for all Alaska industries.

This article covers a narrow range of oil industry employers

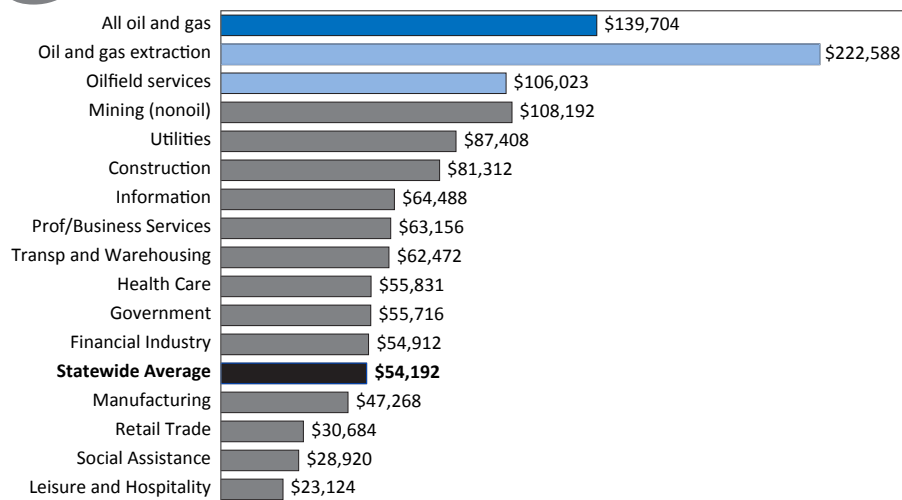
This article refers to a narrowly defined group of oil industry employers. In this case, a direct oil and gas employer is either an oil producer or an oilfield service company.

Thousands of other jobs directly serve this industry, but they aren't categorized as oil industry employers. For example, in fourth quarter 2015, a fourth of the jobs in

Prudhoe Bay were not identified as oil industry employers. Some of these included jobs in security, catering, accommodations, transportation, and engineering services. Although these jobs are important to the industry, and exist because of oil and gas operations in the state, they aren't included here. Pipeline transportation companies are also excluded from these numbers.

3 Oil Industry Earnings Are The State's Highest

ALASKA AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES BY INDUSTRY, 2015

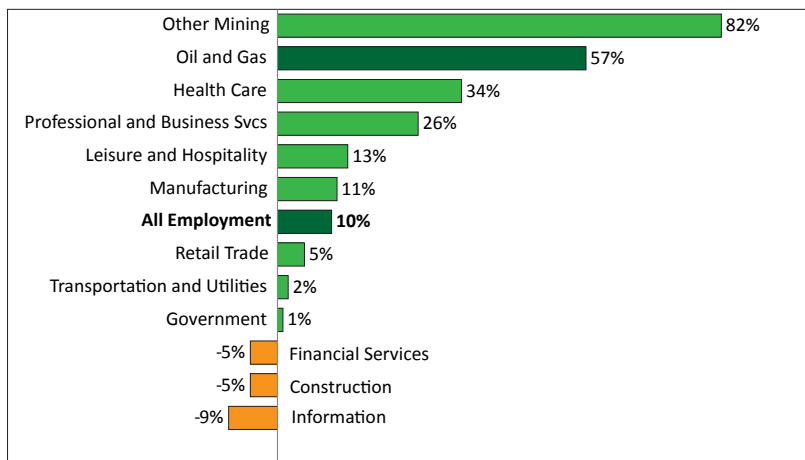


In 2015, annual average earnings for the industry were more than 2.5 times higher than the statewide average. The average for oil and gas extraction, which includes direct producers, was considerably higher than for oilfield services companies.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

4 It Was a Strong Decade for Oil Industry Growth

PERCENT JOB GROWTH BY ALASKA INDUSTRY, 2005 TO 2015



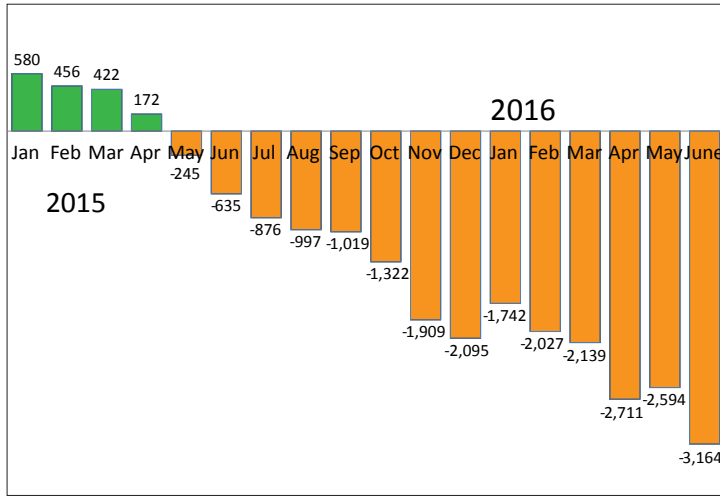
In addition to the oil industry reaching record employment levels during the past decade, it was the second-fastest-growing industry in the state. That hadn't happened since the 1970s.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

5

Growth Turned Negative in Spring 2015

OVER-THE-YEAR CHANGE IN OIL INDUSTRY JOBS



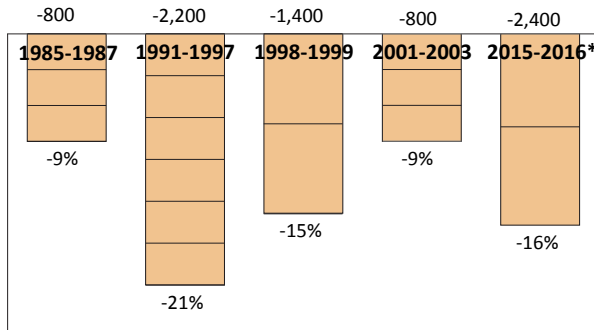
The most recent numbers for oil and gas employment show the industry started to shed jobs in May of 2015 and losses gained momentum in 2016. It's unclear how long this trend will continue, as oil prices will play a critical role.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

6

Comparing Modern Periods of Oil Industry Job Loss

CONTRACTIONS BY NUMBER AND PERCENT



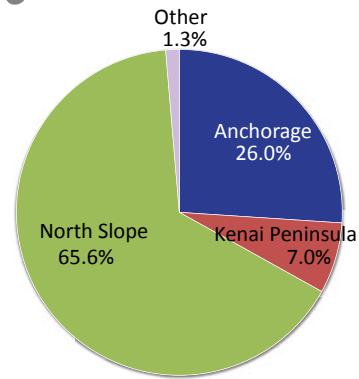
*Compares the first six months of 2015 with first six of 2016
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The industry has weathered several periods of major job loss in recent decades. The largest to date, which also spanned the longest period, took place between 1991 and 1997 when oil prices hit rock bottom. Those losses did not send Alaska into a recession, however, and the state's total job count continued to grow during those years.

7

Most Jobs on Slope

ALASKA OIL INDUSTRY, 2015



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Nearly all oil employment is based in three areas: Anchorage and the North Slope and Kenai Peninsula boroughs. Oil comes from the latter two, and Anchorage serves as the headquarters or service center. In Valdez, the terminus for the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline, jobs are mostly in moving oil, so they're counted as transportation jobs. Fairbanks also has a relatively small number of jobs, but it is a major logistic and supply center for the North Slope.

Annual averages don't reflect monthly swings

The numbers in Exhibit 1 and throughout this article are average monthly job counts for the stated year unless otherwise specified. That can create the appearance of stability, when in reality jobs can fluctuate significantly over the course of the calendar year.

For example, the average monthly job count in 2008 was 12,700, and for 2009 it was down by just 100 jobs, to 12,600. But during a period of extreme oil price volatility in 2008, job counts rose from 12,000 in January to 13,400 by December, then fell from 13,200 in January 2009 to 11,900 by December.

For monthly job counts, see live.laborstats.alaska.gov/ces/.

8

Oil Industry Earnings and Workers

BY BOROUGH OR CENSUS AREA OF RESIDENCY, 2015

	Workers	Earnings	Avg Earnings
Anchorage Municipality	5,121	\$716,159,556	\$139,848
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	2,713	\$281,270,012	\$103,675
Kenai Peninsula Borough	2,536	\$276,596,446	\$109,068
Fairbanks North Star Borough	855	\$74,742,553	\$87,418
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	153	\$13,142,920	\$85,901
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	70	\$5,327,880	\$76,113
North Slope Borough	58	\$2,424,665	\$41,805
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	57	\$5,019,637	\$88,064
Juneau, City and Borough	17	\$1,471,406	\$86,553
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	15	\$926,456	\$61,764
Kodiak Island Borough	14	\$1,075,089	\$76,792
Denali Borough	13	\$1,152,808	\$88,678
Northwest Arctic Borough	13	\$407,513	\$31,347
Dillingham Census Area	12	\$584,924	\$48,744
Haines Borough	12	\$564,444	\$47,037
Lake and Peninsula Borough	10	\$597,593	\$59,759
Sitka, City and Borough	7	\$1,072,165	\$153,166
Bethel Census Area	6	\$290,190	\$48,365
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	5	\$332,040	\$66,408
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	5	\$577,844	\$115,569

Note: Only areas with five or more workers are disclosed.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

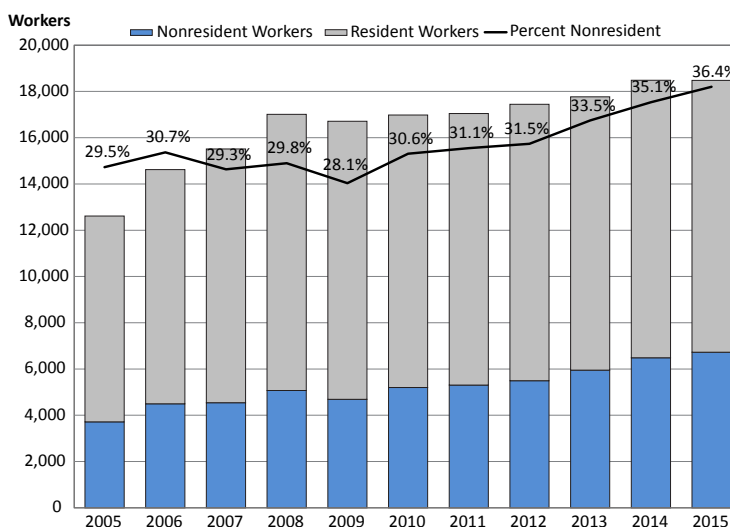
Even though most of the industry's jobs are concentrated in three areas, its resident workforce comes from nearly every part of the state. A prime example is the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, which has neither oil industry employment nor production. However, in 2015, 2,713

Mat-Su residents worked in the industry and earned \$281 million. That figure is especially significant considering Mat-Su's locally generated payroll was just \$906 million. In 2015, 8 percent of workers living in Mat-Su commuted to the North Slope.

9

A High Percentage of Nonresident Workers

ALASKA OIL INDUSTRY, 2005 TO 2015



In 2015, the oil industry employed a record number of nonresidents. For the third year in a row, over a third of its workers were not Alaskans, as determined by Permanent Fund Dividend eligibility criteria. Nonresidents represented over 36 percent of the oil industry workforce and earned 34 percent of its total wages, adding up to \$708 million. On average, nonresidents in the industry earned \$105,158 and residents earned \$118,092.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Hoonah, Alaska



Southeast community carves growing tourism niche

By **SAM DAPCEVICH**

During the Little Ice Age, Tlingits living in Glacier Bay were displaced from their village by a rapid glacial advance. Before the ice reached its peak around 1750, the villagers migrated to the northeastern shore of Port Frederick on Chichagof Island, about 35 miles west of what is now Juneau.

They called their new village *Xuniyaa*, or “Lee of the North Wind.” More than a century later, in 1901, the town’s first postmaster transcribed *Xuniyaa* into “Hoonah.”

The Tlingits who settled in Hoonah were conceivably the first Alaska Natives to have contact with Russian

explorers in 1741, as their seasonal camps stretched from Lituya Bay to Lynn Canal. But non-Natives didn’t settle in Hoonah until nearly a century later, when Christian missionaries arrived shortly after the explorer and conservationist John Muir visited in 1879 and 1880.

Today, the town has just under 800 residents and was 66 percent Alaska Native at the most recent census compared to 19 percent statewide, making it Southeast Alaska’s largest Tlingit community. Residents prefer the spelling “Huna,” both for the village corporation and the town itself.

Fishing dominated early economy

Salmon fishing was the dominant economic force in

1 Commercial Fishing Plays a Significant Role in Hoonah

HALIBUT AND SALMON EARNINGS AND POUNDAGE, 2011 TO 2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Permits fished	70	67	71	60	64
Total pounds landed	2,533,594	1,513,803	5,045,229	1,827,849	3,430,038
Salmon (all types)	2,343,165	1,330,391	4,810,746	1,683,413	3,270,314
Halibut (long line only, <60 ft)	49,420	55,851	78,173	54,959	58,491
Estimated gross earnings	\$2,695,176	\$2,021,900	\$3,636,701	\$2,005,470	\$1,833,816
Salmon (all types)	\$1,897,620	\$1,307,694	\$2,852,575	\$1,462,600	\$1,228,841
Halibut (long line only, <60 ft)	\$239,190	\$253,509	\$322,654	\$261,014	\$291,685

Source: Alaska Commercial Fishery Entry Commission (CFEC): *Vessel Characteristics and Statistics by Alaskan City, Permit Fishing Activity by City*



Above, this aerial view of Hoonah is courtesy of the City of Hoonah.

Hoonah for most of the 20th century. Seiners operated by Tlingit captains and their crews were well known for their ability to fish the resource-rich but turbulent tidewaters flowing past the nearby Inian Islands. In 1912, the first cannery opened on the northwestern shore of Port Frederick.

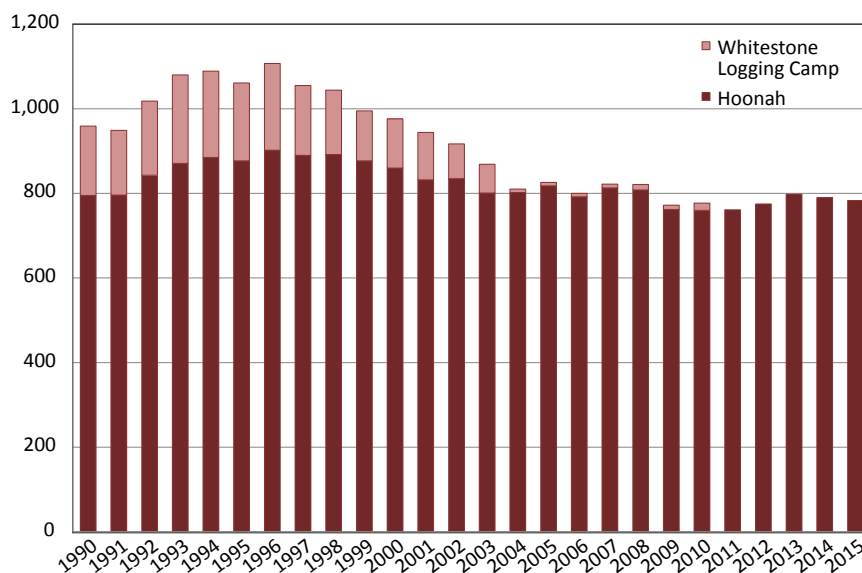
Eight seiners were based out of Hoonah in the 1920s, and the fleet peaked at about 20 boats in the 1930s. During that decade, Hoonah seiners had up to 10

crew members, when the typical crew was six. This allowed them to fish many more sets per day, which typically meant larger hauls.

In 1938, the federal government began granting economic development loans to chartered Native associations, and Hoonah Indian Association was federally recognized the following year. During the state's territorial days, HIA lent federal dollars to fishermen for purchasing vessels, gear, and upgrades.

2 Timber Industry, Population Declined

HOONAH, 1990 TO 2015



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section



A cruise ship is anchored near Icy Strait Point in Hoonah in 2013, before the cruise ship dock was built. Hoonah is the most recent Southeast cruise port to install a cruise ship dock. Hoonah's dock was completed in 2016. Photo by Flickr user Tom Brady

The Southeast Alaska salmon run collapsed in 1953, though, and the number of boats later stabilized between 12 and 14. The Icy Strait Salmon Co. shut down that year as a result of the crash, and the cannery was used for storage and boat repair until 1999, after Huna Totem purchased it in 1996 for conversion into a tourism facility.

The Hoonah seine fleet continued to fish for other processors, including Petersburg Fisheries and Ward Cove Packing Company. According to the local harbor-master, about four seiners fish from Hoonah's port today.

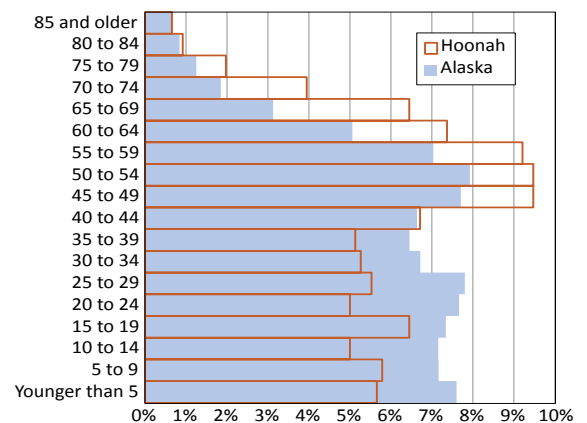
The Thompson Fish Co., established in Hoonah around 1962, evolved into the present-day Hoonah Cold Storage, a major processor of halibut and Tanner crab from the Glacier Bay area.

Harbor draws outside customers

Because Hoonah is known in Southeast for its quality harbor facilities, low moorage rates, and relatively easy access to flourishing fishing grounds, many vessel owners from other communities moor there.

3 An Older Population

HOONAH AND STATE, 2010 CENSUS

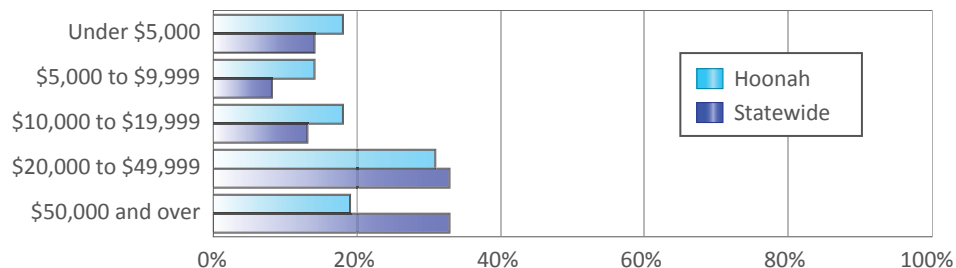


Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Hoonah's Marine Industrial Center features a 220-ton travel lift haul out. Its traffic has increased steadily over the last six years, and in 2015, over three-fourths of the vessels hauled out were out-of-town customers.

4 Wages Are Lower Than Average

HOONAH AND STATEWIDE, 2015



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Population fell after logging ended

Like the rest of Southeast, Hoonah has a much older population than the state as a whole, with a median age of 44.6 versus 39.3 in Southeast and 33.8 state-wide at the most recent census.¹ (See Exhibit 3.) It also has a low birth rate.

Although the population goes up considerably during the busy summer, the resident population has been on a slow decline for the past 16 years, from a high of 860 in 2000 to 783 in 2015: a loss of 9 percent. But going back another 10 years and including the decline of Southeast's timber industry (See Exhibit 2.)

For a brief time, from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, logging was Hoonah's top employer. The nearby Whitestone Logging Camp, just a six-mile drive from downtown Hoonah, reached a peak of 209 residents in 1993, but that dropped to zero by 2011.

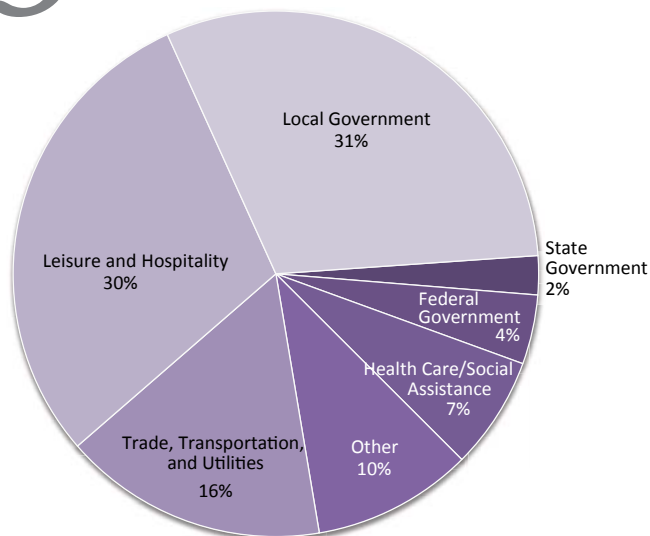
After the decline of the timber industry, only smaller operations remained. Hoonah currently has two commercial sawmills, which employ up to 25 people in the summer.

Today, over half of Hoonah's year-round residents work in local government and in leisure and hospitality. (See Exhibit 5.) Leisure and hospitality is mainly tourism, and because many of these jobs are seasonal and part-time, residents' average yearly wages are

¹Median age for places as small as Hoonah is estimated less frequently, so the 2010 Census has the most recent reliable data.

5 Hoonah's Industries

PERCENT OF TOTAL JOBS, 2015



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

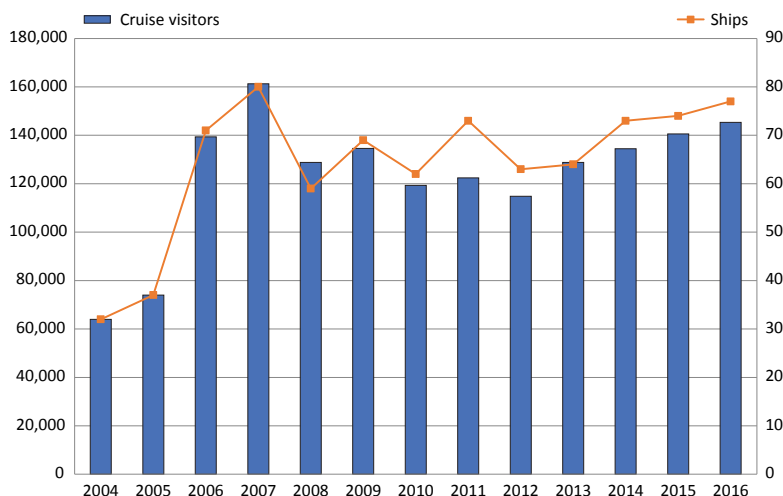
considerably less than the statewide average. (See Exhibit 4.)

First cruise ship arrived in 2004

By the time John Muir arrived in 1879, icy Glacier Bay had opened back up. The glacial advance that displaced villagers and which Captain Vancouver's 1794

6 More Cruise Ships Visiting Hoonah

2004 TO 2016



Source: Icy Strait Point

The controversial reality television show "The Alaskan Bush People" has been produced in and around Hoonah for the last four years. The film crew rents local housing and vehicles for four to seven months of the year.

expedition witnessed as a wall of ice had retreated an astonishing 46 miles.

In 1883, the Pacific Coast Steamship Company's ship Idaho brought the first batch of adventure-tourists to Glacier Bay, but for Hoonah, tourism didn't take root. For the next 120 years, most ships bound for Glacier Bay paid no attention to the fishing and timber town across Icy Strait.

In 1996, Huna Totem, Hoonah's village corporation, bought the Icy Strait cannery and began construction of the Icy Strait Point tourism facility on the site in 2001. Large-scale cruise ships began to visit the community a few summers later, with the 866-foot Celebrity Cruise Lines ship Mercury, carrying 1,800 tourists, being the first to arrive in May 2004.

Hoonah didn't get a cruise ship dock until 2016, making it the most recent Southeast cruise port to build one. Initially, cruise ships anchored or moored to a buoy near Icy Strait Point, which required ships to use lightering boats to transport passengers to shore and limited the number who would disembark.

Construction of the 400-foot dock began in early 2015, with more than half the \$23.7 million price tag funded by a state development grant and the rest by Huna Totem. The dock became operational in May 2016, drawing more ships and increasing by 15 to 20 percent the passengers likely to disembark.

Although Hoonah's cruise ship passenger numbers were up and down between 2004 and 2012, they've increased steadily since. (See Exhibit 6.) An adventure center and restaurant were completed in 2016 in addition to the new dock, and 77 ships arrived that summer bringing 145,344 passengers, with even more expected in 2017. This year, Disney Cruise Lines will visit Icy Strait Point for the first time, as will Seabourn and Carnival Cruise Lines.

Tlingit culture and the local Native corporation have been strong contributors to tourism's recent growth in Hoonah. Nine of the 15 businesses associated with Icy Strait Point are owned by locals. According to Huna Totem, 87 percent of Icy Strait Point's employees were local in 2016 and 83 percent were Alaska Native.

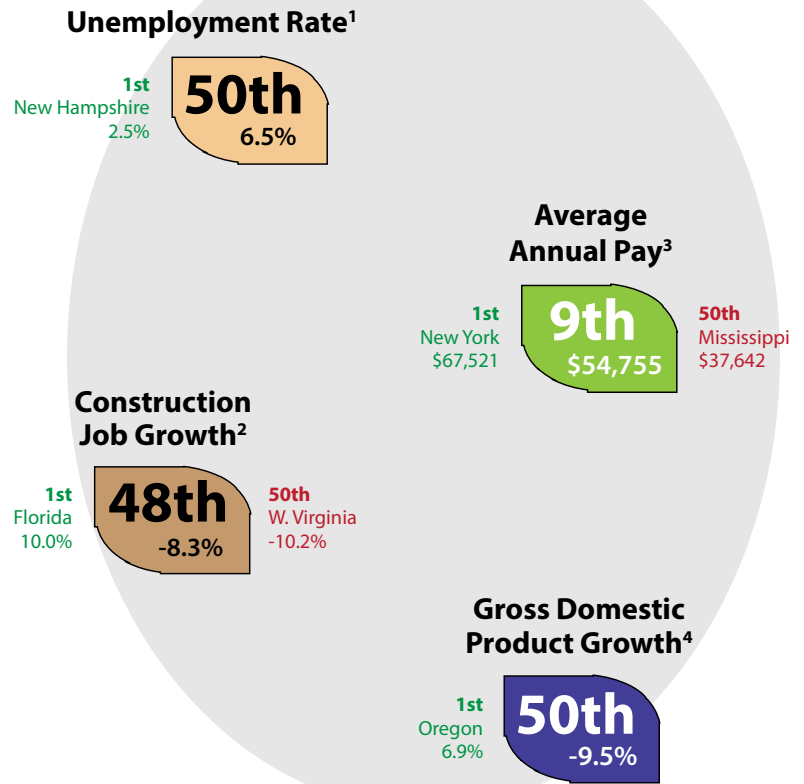
Sam Dapceвич is webmaster for the Department of Labor and Workforce Development in Juneau. Reach him at (907) 465-2054 or sam.dapceвич@alaska.gov.

The Month in Numbers

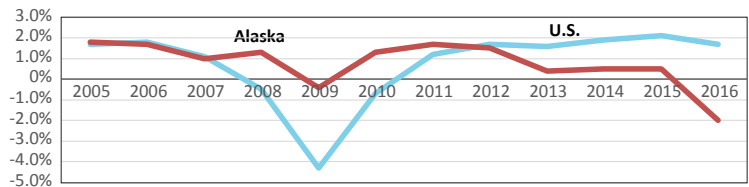
Unemployment Rates

	Prelim.		Revised
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED	12/16	11/16	12/15
United States	4.7	4.6	5.0
Alaska Statewide	6.7	6.8	6.6
NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED			
United States	4.5	4.4	4.8
Alaska Statewide	6.5	6.6	6.7
Anchorage/Mat-Su Region			
Municipality of Anchorage	5.1	5.2	5.0
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	8.1	8.0	8.1
Gulf Coast Region			
Kenai Peninsula Borough	8.0	8.1	8.6
Kodiak Island Borough	6.7	4.9	6.9
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	9.4	9.3	10.6
Interior Region			
Denali Borough	18.4	19.4	19.4
Fairbanks North Star Borough	5.7	5.7	5.7
Southeast Fairbanks CA	10.1	9.9	11.5
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	17.1	16.3	17.2
Northern Region			
Nome Census Area	11.5	11.8	10.5
North Slope Borough	5.9	6.6	4.6
Northwest Arctic Borough	15.7	15.5	14.5
Southeast Region			
Haines Borough	11.2	10.6	13.3
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	14.0	14.6	17.7
Juneau, City and Borough	4.5	4.5	4.7
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	6.5	6.5	7.6
Petersburg Borough	9.9	8.8	10.3
Prince of Wales-Hyder CA	11.7	11.1	12.6
Sitka, City and Borough	4.3	4.3	5.5
Skagway, Municipality	20.3	18.0	23.0
Wrangell, City and Borough	7.7	8.0	9.3
Yakutat, City and Borough	9.0	9.7	11.2
Southwest Region			
Aleutians East Borough	4.6	4.3	6.3
Aleutians West Census Area	4.5	4.4	6.0
Bethel Census Area	12.1	12.1	13.5
Bristol Bay Borough	13.4	12.6	11.2
Dillingham Census Area	11.1	9.6	11.0
Kusilvak Census Area	17.9	16.5	20.7
Lake and Peninsula Borough	12.8	12.5	14.2

How Alaska Ranks



Job Growth in Alaska and the Nation



All data sources are U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section, unless otherwise noted.

¹December seasonally adjusted unemployment rates

²Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, percent change, second quarter 2015 to second quarter 2016

³Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2015

⁴Bureau of Economic Analysis, change in current dollar GDP, 2014 to 2015

Employer Resources

Transition Camps prepare students with disabilities

Last year, more than 60 Alaska businesses participated in Transition Camps, which provide students with disabilities the opportunity to explore career pathways in various industries as they begin to move from school to work. Transition Camps help these students gain a better understanding of themselves, their career options, and opportunities for education or training.

The Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Training Services divisions and the Department of Education and Early Development jointly fund these three-to-five-day camps,¹ which are conducted in school district and juvenile justice facilities. Each camp provides career exploration activities and presentations by businesses as well as providers of postsecondary education and training.

¹Alaska Mental Health Trust provides additional funding.

Student surveys showed that employers who shared their personal career paths had the most positive responses. Personal stories give insight into the decision process, allowing students to learn from someone who has successfully navigated the barriers many of them may face.

Businesses may participate in one or more Transition Camps throughout the year. Wells Fargo and the Alaska Process Industry Careers Consortium have presented multiple times, as have AVTEC and the University of Alaska.

Learn more about Transition Camps by emailing jim.kreatschman@alaska.gov.

Employer Resources is written by the Employment and Training Services Division of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Safety Minute

Cold weather can exacerbate symptoms for asthmatics

People with asthma can be prone to even more symptoms during the winter. Cold air causes bronchoconstriction, or narrowing of the airways, which can make breathing more difficult and stressful or trigger an asthma attack. And exercise, which is already a frequent asthma trigger, becomes doubly problematic with cold, dry air.

Staying indoors has its own problems for asthma sufferers, however, as mold, pets, dust mites, and other pests can also trigger asthma. These indoor allergens have been repeatedly identified as part of the reason asthma rates are higher among children in inner-city neighborhoods.

The best course of action is to see a specialist who can provide you with a proper routine to prevent and stop asthmatic episodes. Even if you haven't had a flare-up for a long time, continue to follow your doctor's instructions for controlling your asthma and make sure you have current prescriptions for all medications. Your asthma plan should include when to take each type of medication and when to call for

emergency medical help.

Divide the plan into three categories or zones:

1. How to handle your asthma when you are feeling good and have no symptoms
2. What to do if you start to have symptoms
3. The steps to take if your symptoms are severe or you cannot control them

Asthma specialists say you probably won't need to change your action plan for winter, but make sure you review your plan and keep it handy during the cold months, as you may be more likely to need it.

Call (800) 656-4972 or visit labor.alaska.gov/lss/oshhome.htm to learn more about providing a safe and healthful workplace for Alaskans.

Safety Minute is written by the Labor Standards and Safety Division of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

