

Movers aren't staying as long

Length of stay down among all age groups since 1990

By DAVID HOWELL

Migration has shaped Alaska, and the numbers have fluctuated considerably over the years. Changes were drastic early on, driven by military buildups for World War II and the Korean War and then by oil-related booms and busts in the decades that followed. Migration calmed around 1990, netting the state about 300 new residents each year on average.¹ The trend flipped after 2010, and we've averaged a net migration loss of 4,500 people per year since.

Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend applications give Alaska the unique ability to analyze in-migrants in detail

¹Net migration is the number of people who move to Alaska in a year minus the number who leave. The rest of this article deals solely with the numbers arriving.

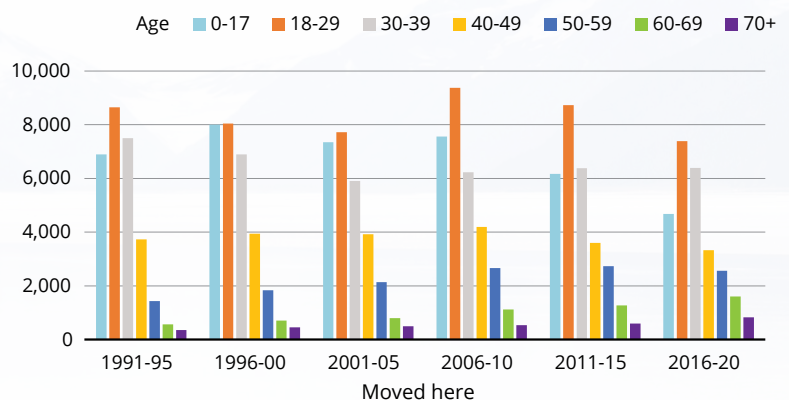
About the data

Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend application data allow a timely look at migration patterns that other states don't have, but with a few limitations that result in an undercount.

Because PFD eligibility requires a full calendar year of living in Alaska, some people move to the state and leave before ever filing. Active duty military personnel also apply for PFDs less often than most of the population because they must claim Alaska residency to file. Although these data underestimate migration as a result, they are useful for gauging broad migration trends.

Because this article's data come solely from PFD applications, the numbers will not necessarily match our other data sets.

Numbers of movers by age, arrival date



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

over the decades to see what changed. (See the sidebar on this page.) For this analysis, we broke applicants into six groups based on the year they moved to Alaska to compare their demographics and how long they stayed: 1991-1995, 1996-2000, 2001-2005, 2006-2010, 2011-2015, and 2016-2020.

While some characteristics remained consistent — we still gain more movers in their 20s and 30s than any other age group, for example — the length of time people stay decreased over the last few decades in all age groups, regions, and major industries.

The yearly inflow declined

Steady streams of people moved to Alaska throughout the 1990s, averaging 29,100 a year in the early '90s and 29,900 late in the decade. That fell in the early 2000s to 28,300, then jumped to 31,700 between 2006 and 2010 as the Lower 48 weathered the Great Recession while high oil prices kept Alaska's economy afloat.

The numbers of people moving to Alaska in the

early 2010s resembled the '90s but took a downward turn late in the decade to just 26,800 annually.

The steep migration decline is more nuanced than it might appear. Birth rates in the Lower 48 have been falling since the mid-2000s, resulting in fewer children moving to Alaska with their parents.

The number of in-movers under 18 dropped dramatically in the most recent five-year period, falling below 5,000 per year for the first time in the study period (to 4,700). The total number of adults moving in dipped just below the 30-year average, to 22,100.

Slight changes in demographics

While the numbers of migrants have changed over time, the demographics have remained similar — that is, most movers are young adults, often men in their early 20s to mid-30s. Between 53 and 55 percent of adults who move to Alaska are men.

Women tend to stay in the state longer, however. The differences in the length of stay between men and women are minor, but the gap has grown over time. (See the table above.)

Lower 48 trends also influence the demographics of Alaska's migrants. As mentioned earlier, the number of children has dropped with declining birth rates in the rest of the country. Similarly, the large baby boom generation born between 1946 and 1964 means more migrants are older. That's not to say older groups are moving more than they used to — there are just more older people in general.

In-migrants not staying as long

Because movers tend to be young, it isn't surprising that Alaska's population turnover has always been high. People in their 20s and 30s are more mobile

Migrants of all ages stay for shorter periods

Stayed less than 5 years

Arrived	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Female	Male	Total
1991-1995	35.1%	28.7%	26.5%	27.0%	26.9%	37.1%	30.6%	31.0%	30.8%
1996-2000	34.4%	27.1%	25.1%	26.3%	26.4%	35.4%	29.5%	29.4%	29.5%
2001-2005	35.3%	28.9%	26.1%	27.6%	27.1%	37.2%	30.0%	31.4%	30.7%
2006-2010	38.5%	31.8%	29.1%	29.2%	29.7%	36.8%	32.4%	34.7%	33.6%
2011-2015	43.2%	38.6%	35.4%	35.4%	35.1%	41.2%	36.9%	41.4%	39.3%

Stayed 5 years or more

Arrived	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Female	Male	Total
1991-1995	64.9%	71.3%	73.5%	73.0%	73.1%	62.9%	69.4%	69.0%	69.2%
1996-2000	65.6%	72.9%	74.9%	73.7%	73.6%	64.6%	70.5%	70.6%	70.5%
2001-2005	64.7%	71.1%	73.9%	72.4%	72.9%	62.8%	70.0%	68.6%	69.3%
2006-2010	61.5%	68.2%	70.9%	70.8%	70.3%	63.2%	67.6%	65.3%	66.4%
2011-2015	56.8%	61.4%	64.6%	64.6%	64.9%	58.8%	63.1%	58.6%	60.7%

Stayed 10 years or more

Arrived	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Female	Male	Total
1991-1995	45.5%	52.1%	55.4%	50.9%	52.8%	33.0%	49.7%	49.8%	49.7%
1996-2000	45.3%	50.5%	56.3%	52.3%	50.5%	31.4%	49.3%	49.4%	49.4%
2001-2005	43.7%	48.1%	53.6%	50.8%	48.2%	32.3%	48.1%	46.9%	47.4%
2006-2010	36.7%	40.8%	46.2%	44.2%	44.5%	29.9%	42.1%	39.1%	40.4%

Stayed 15 years or more

Arrived	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+	Female	Male	Total
1991-1995	36.6%	42.3%	43.3%	35.9%	34.8%	14.8%	39.3%	39.1%	39.2%
1996-2000	35.2%	40.3%	43.6%	37.0%	35.7%	15.0%	38.4%	37.8%	38.1%
2001-2005	31.1%	35.2%	38.0%	33.2%	31.0%	13.3%	34.7%	32.2%	33.3%

Notes: These data cannot account for deaths. Length-of-stay numbers exclude in-movers under 18 because they accompany their parents rather than moving by choice.

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

than in later years when they have more responsibilities, such as families and careers.

Most of Alaska's in-migrants spend at least five years in the state, but half stay fewer than 10 years, and under 40 percent make it to 15 years. These percentages declined after 2005.

From 1991 to 2005, around 70 percent stayed five or more years. That dropped to 61 percent among those who moved here between 2011 and 2015. The trend appears to be continuing — 31 percent of the people who moved to Alaska after 2015 have already left.

The group staying at least 10 years showed the biggest change. In the 1990s, about 50 percent of in-movers stayed 10 years or longer, which dropped to 40 percent for the 2006-2010 arrivals.

A comparatively steady percentage of migrants

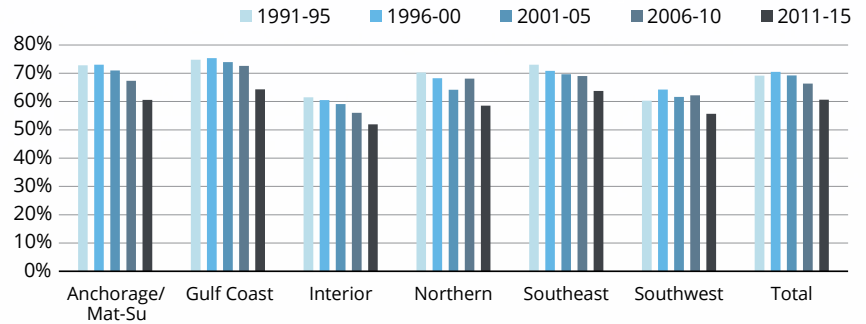
continued to put down roots in Alaska, though. The group staying 15 years or longer shrunk the least over the last few decades.

Biggest drop among movers in their 30s

The youngest migrants were the most likely to leave Alaska quickly in every period we examined. Before 2005, 65 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds stayed at least five years. Among those who arrived between 2011 and 2015, 57 percent did.

While that was a big decline, stays for most of the other age groups shortened even more. The most dramatic example is 30-to-39-year-olds who stayed

Movers to a region who stayed 5-plus years



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

in Alaska for 10-plus years. In the 1990s, 52 percent of movers in their 30s stayed at least 10 years but in recent years, that fell to 41 percent.

Similarly, over 55 percent of migrants in their 40s who moved here in the 1990s stayed at least a decade. For those who entered Alaska about 10 years ago, it declined to 46 percent.

People 70 and older come and go more because of their circumstances than the broader economic forces that drive younger groups, and their percentages haven't changed as much.

People who move here later in life are usually retiring to Alaska. Lengths of stay are fuzzy for people 70 and older, as the data can't distinguish between those who die in Alaska and those who leave the state for health reasons.

How long movers stayed, by industry

Industry	Arrived in Alaska			
	2001-2005	2006-2010	2011-2015	15-yr avg
All in-migrants	69.3%	66.4%	60.7%	65.3%
All workers	73.9%	71.2%	64.9%	69.9%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	64.3%	65.5%	62.8%	64.1%
Manufacturing	66.9%	68.8%	60.0%	70.6%
Accommodation and Food Services	67.1%	64.9%	59.0%	63.4%
Retail Trade	68.0%	64.7%	59.4%	65.2%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	69.4%	65.9%	61.3%	65.4%
Retail Trade	69.5%	66.6%	60.1%	63.9%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	70.1%	73.0%	64.9%	69.4%
Information	71.2%	69.6%	63.9%	68.3%
Other Services (except Public Admin)	72.3%	72.0%	66.6%	70.3%
Manufacturing	72.7%	70.7%	68.4%	64.9%
Admin, Support, Waste Mgmt/Remediation	73.1%	69.1%	64.3%	68.7%
Finance and Insurance	73.4%	69.9%	68.0%	70.5%
Educational Services	74.0%	71.9%	67.7%	71.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	74.7%	70.4%	65.6%	70.2%
Wholesale Trade	74.8%	74.3%	68.0%	72.4%
Health Care and Social Assistance	75.9%	74.4%	68.8%	72.9%
Transportation and Warehousing	76.0%	73.5%	68.5%	72.7%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Svcs	76.4%	72.4%	63.6%	70.7%
Manufacturing	76.6%	71.7%	64.1%	70.4%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil/Gas Extraction	77.8%	71.7%	60.5%	69.8%
Construction	80.9%	74.3%	64.8%	73.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	82.4%	89.8%	70.8%	81.2%
Public Administration	82.5%	81.0%	74.7%	79.3%
Utilities	83.3%	78.1%	79.0%	80.0%

Notes: The industry specified is where a worker earned the highest wages. Includes only workers 18 and older. Wages are inflation-adjusted to 2021 dollars. Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The longest stays are in the Gulf Coast

People were more likely to stay in some regions than others, and those differences remained surprisingly consistent over the last 30 years. However, migrants' stays shortened in all parts of the state.

Over 70 percent of people who moved to the Gulf Coast Region between 1991 and 2010 stayed at least five years, which dipped to 64 percent thereafter. Movers to that region are often retiring to the Kenai Peninsula.

The Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna Region's pattern looked similar, although the share staying five-plus years dropped below 70 percent a bit earlier than the Gulf Coast (2006-2010).

The Interior Region's population turnover is higher because of its large military and student populations. During the 1990s and 2000s, about 60 percent stayed in the Interior at least five years. That fell to 52 percent for those entering between 2010 and 2014.

The Southwest's percentage swung from period to period but typically fell between the Interior and the Gulf Coast.

The Northern Region ranged from 64 to 70 percent for most of the periods but dropped to 59 percent for migrants who arrived between 2011 and 2015.

Southeast's pattern was similar to the Gulf Coast's. In the earlier periods, around 70 percent of the people who moved to Southeast stayed at least five years. That percentage fell in recent years but remained higher than elsewhere in Alaska.

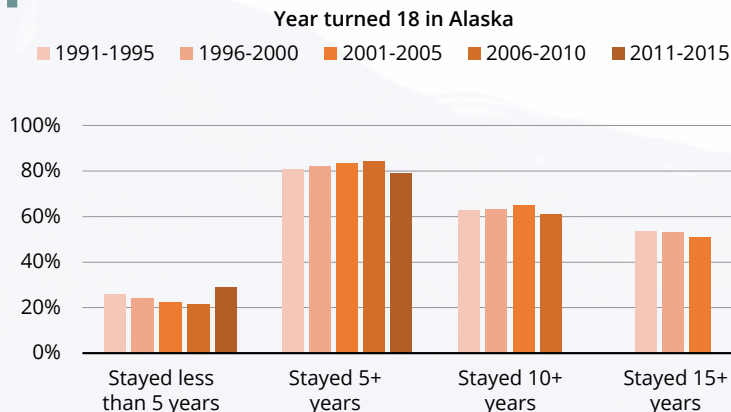
All industries see shorter stays

Working migrants tend to stay in Alaska a little longer, but similar to migrants overall, the percentage who stayed here for at least five years decreased.

The typical stay varies by the type of work movers do. Industries that hire younger people had the lowest percentages stay at least five years. These included agriculture and fishing, food services, manufacturing (mostly seafood processing in Alaska), and retail. Migrants in industries that require specialized or experienced workers tend to stay longer; utilities and management are examples. (See the table on the previous page.)

Since the 2000s, all industries have seen a decline in the percentage who stay more than five years. The decreases were largest for oil and gas and the

How long Alaskan 18-year-olds stay



Note: Includes children who were born in Alaska as well as those who moved to Alaska before turning 18.

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

construction industry. These track with job loss trends in those industries in recent years.

Raised here vs. moved in later

PFD applicants who turned 18 in the state, whether they were born here or moved to Alaska as children, were much more likely to stay than those who came as adults. During all but the most recent period, 80 percent of Alaskans who turned 18 stayed five years or longer, and over all the study periods, over 50 percent stayed at least 15 years.

Those who attended college outside the state or joined the military but retained their Alaska residency were included with those who stayed.

The gap between those who came of age in Alaska and those who moved in later increased with time as the movers stayed for shorter periods. Stays for people who turned 18 here also shortened, but not nearly as much as for adult movers.

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