# A closer look at 2019's population

## What estimates show about Alaska's trends and how we compare

By SARA WHITNEY and LIZ BROOKS

Alaska's population decreased 0.4 percent from July 2018 to July 2019, our new estimates show. The biggest drivers were a decline in the number of people moving to Alaska and fewer births.

While this was the third straight year of overall population loss, the declines have been small. Over those three years, Alaska's population fell by a total of 1.2 percent. The state's 2019 population of 731,007 is about 8,600 below the peak of 739,649 people in 2016.

### About timing and residency

Alaska population estimates are as of July 1 of each year, and data on the components of change (births, deaths, and migration) cover the previous 12 months.

The reference date of July 1 matches the Census Bureau's estimate period and is meant to represent the population at mid-year. It is not intended to capture Alaska's larger summer population, as these estimates include only those who consider Alaska their "usual residence," which the bureau defines as the place where they live and sleep most of the time. Seasonal workers are not counted if they mainly live somewhere else.

### Fewer than 10,000 babies born last year

While 2019's population decline was mainly a continuation of longer-term trends such as ongoing migration losses and population aging, the sharp drop in births was a notable change. The number of births in Alaska has fallen 15 percent over the last three years.

From July 2018 to July 2019, 9,885 babies were born in Alaska, which was 500 fewer than the year before. The last time Alaska's births dropped below 10,000 was 2002, when the state had about 89,000 fewer people.

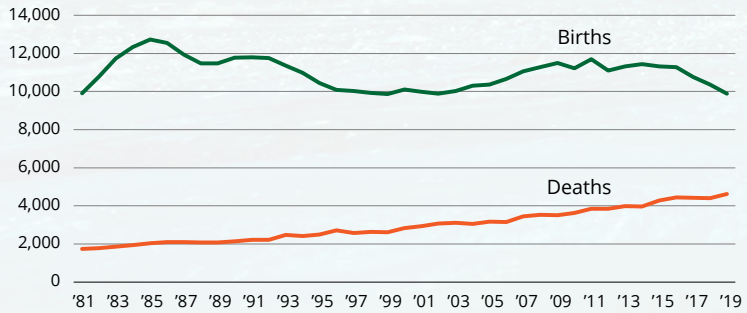
This trend isn't unique to Alaska — it's just more recent. Births have been on the decline nationally since 2007, aside from a small uptick in 2014, and the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 estimates show births dropped in 42 states and the District of Columbia over the year.

### U.S., Alaska birth rates on a decline, but Alaska's rate remains higher

In terms of birth *rates*, Alaska and the U.S. are both on the decline, but Alaska's rates have always been and remain above U.S. rates — especially in rural Alaska.

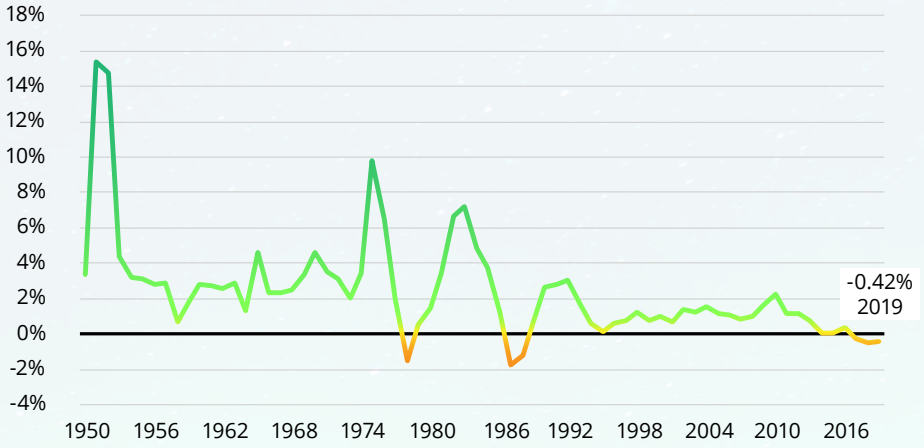
Alaska's crude birth rate (annual births per 1,000

## Alaska's number of annual births has dropped in the last few years




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

## Alaska's yearly percent change in total population from 1950 to 2019




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

people) was in the mid-30s during much of the 1950s, and it didn't drop below 30 until 1964.

After the early 1990s, Alaska's rate remained around 15 or 16 births per 1,000 for nearly two decades before falling below 15 for the first time in 2017. Last year, the rate dropped to 13.5.

The U.S. rate hasn't topped 20 births per 1,000 since 1964 and has declined steadily in recent years, from 14.3 in 2007 to a 50-year low of 11.6 in 2018.

For many years, Alaska's younger population and higher birth rates helped ensure steady overall growth. Although the state has been losing more movers than we've gained since 2013, natural increase — births minus deaths — more than offset those losses until 2017. That year, the total population declined for the first time since 1988.

Most of these trends aren't unique to Alaska. The U.S. population is aging, its net migration is decreasing, and the national birth rate has trended downward since 2007.

### Deaths and an older population

Less natural increase can result from more deaths as well as fewer births, and Alaska had about 200 more deaths in 2019 than the year before. The aging population is a factor in both trends, in Alaska and nationwide, as the large baby boomer generation born between 1946 and 1964 moves into the older age groups.

Nationally, deaths rose in 24 states and D.C. in 2019. Four states had more deaths than births: West Virginia, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

In line with the aging trend, Alaska's 65-plus age group grew by 4,200 people in 2019, reaching 91,278, and is projected to top 136,000 by 2030.

At the same time, Alaska's younger age groups continued to get smaller. The population between 18 and 64 decreased for the sixth year in a row, down nearly 5,000 people to 455,583. The 17-and-younger group decreased for a third year, by 2,400, to 184,146 total children.

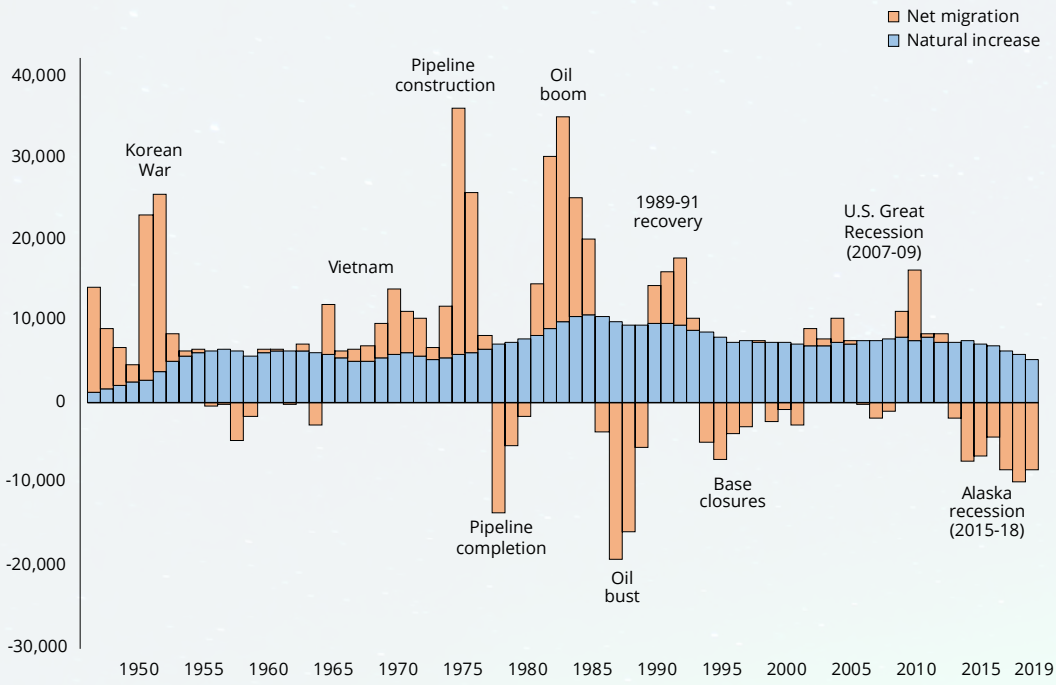
### Consistent net migration losses continue

Another year of net migration loss was the main reason Alaska's population decreased, as more people left Alaska than moved in for a seventh straight year. Net migration — in-movers minus out-movers — was -8,300 in 2019, similar to the prior years' losses.

As of 2019, the state has lost more people to net migration over this seven-year stretch than during the deep recession and housing collapse of the 1980s, although that loss was shorter and steeper. Alaska lost 44,081 people to net migration over four years during the '80s, and the current streak's net loss is 45,828.

Speculation that more people were leaving the

## Components of Alaska's population change since 1947




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

state was common in recent years, but while it might seem counterintuitive, the opposite is true. *Fewer* people left Alaska last year than we've seen since 2011 — but drastically fewer moved to the state than is typical.

### Large migration flows in and out are normal, but notably fewer are moving in

Large numbers of people moving in and out of the state each year has long been Alaska's norm. In any given year in recent decades, about 40,000 to 50,000 people moved to Alaska and another 40,000 to 50,000 left. (For more on Alaska's historical migration trends, see the March 2018 issue of *Trends*.)

Alaska has the biggest annual migration flows of any state as a percentage of the population, regardless of how the economy is doing. While the population's roots are deeper than they were when oil prices tanked in the 1980s, Alaska is still a young and relatively new state, and around 60 percent of residents weren't born here. Our large military presence is another reason the population is so mobile.

The 10-year average for annual out-movers is 45,000, and 43,000 moved away last year. Conversely, while an average of 42,000 moved in each year over the last decade, just 35,000 people arrived last year.

Those who leave Alaska mainly relocate to Washington, Texas, California, Florida, and Oregon: states that are large and mostly close. The least likely locations are the smaller states on the East Coast. These destinations haven't changed much over the years.

### Alaska's migration losses show some similarities to national trends

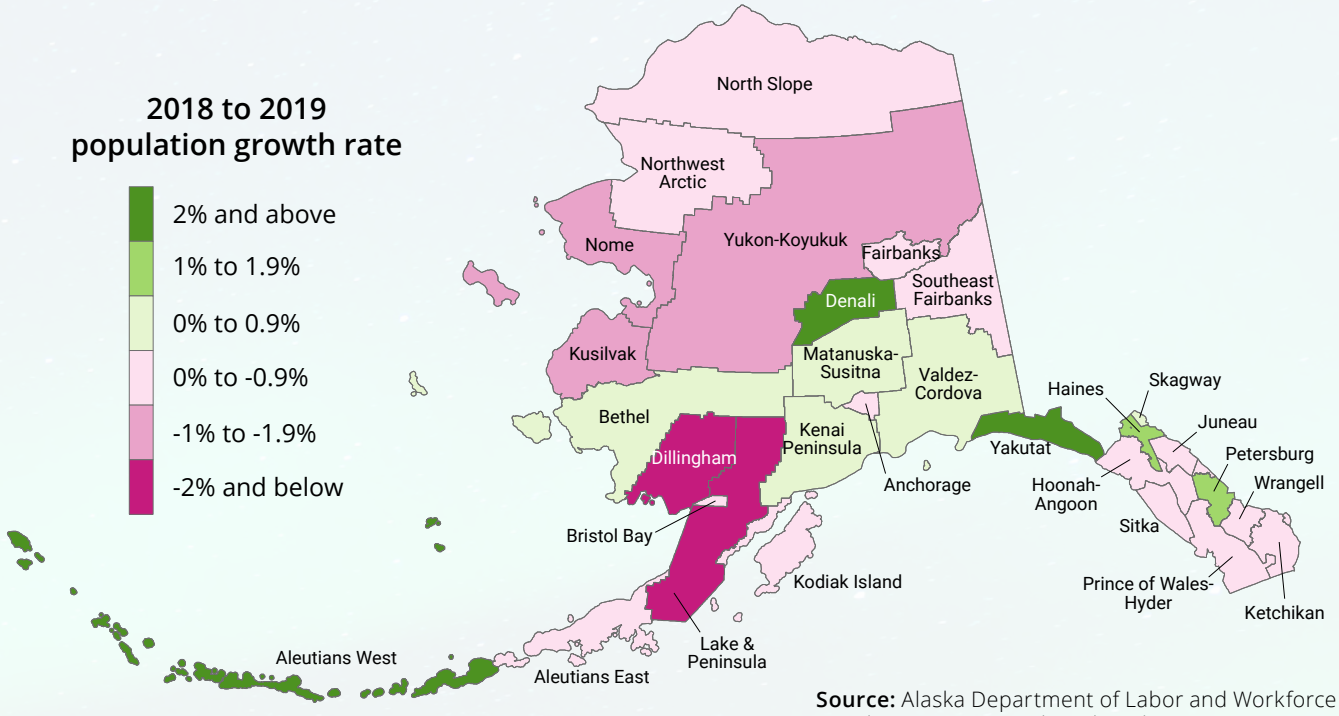
The reasons people move or stay are complex and outside the scope of these data, but an especially strong economy in much of the Lower 48 and a relatively weak economy in Alaska are among the likely factors.

The state gained net movers during the U.S. Great Recession of the late 2000s and its aftermath, which barely scathed Alaska, but Alaska's net migration turned negative soon thereafter — at least two years before the state recession hit.

Similar to the other state population trends mentioned earlier, declining net migration is a larger-scale pattern. Immigration to the United States has been falling since 2016.

Natural increase and immigration did offset the number who left the U.S. in 2019, but not by much.

# Most parts of Alaska lost some population between 2018 and 2019




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

The nation grew 0.5 percent overall last year, and growth has slowed each year since the decade's peak growth rate of just 0.73 percent in 2015.

## How population change played out around the state from 2018 to 2019

Around the state, most areas showed some population loss in 2019, as the map above shows.

Anchorage, which is home to about 40 percent of Alaskans, lost the largest number of people. The city's population dropped by 2,643 last year, which was a 0.9 percent loss. While that loss was modest in percent terms, it brought Anchorage's population down to its 2010 level.

The Fairbanks area's population fell below its 2010 level, with a decline of 954, although the trend is set to change over the next few years as new military personnel and their families start arriving at Eielson Air Force Base this summer with the F-35 fighter jets. The military expects about 1,300 additional active duty personnel by 2022, and the project will also bring in federal civilian workers and contractors.

The Southeast and Northern regions continued their previous trends of modest loss, with Northern down by 195 people and Southeast by 284. The majority of Southeast's loss was in Juneau (-191).

Several areas' populations ticked up slightly, but the Matanuska-Susitna Borough was the only part of the state to add a significant number of people. The borough grew by 1,024 in 2019, reaching 106,438.

Mat-Su has been the state's strongest source of growth for the past decade, although its growth has slowed. Mat-Su overtook the Fairbanks North Star Borough as the state's second-largest borough equivalent in 2015, when it approached 100,000 people.

For detailed estimates by area and community, see the table on page 8. For complete 2019 data, see: live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop.

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# Detailed yearly population change by borough or census area from 2010 to 2019

| Area | Census April 2010 | Estimate July 2011 | Estimate July 2012 | Estimate July 2013 | Estimate July 2014 | Estimate July 2015 | Estimate July 2016 | Estimate July 2017 | Estimate July 2018 | Estimate July 2019 | Natural Increase 2010 to 2019 | Natural Increase 2018 to 2019 | Net Migration 2010 to 2019 | Net Migration 2018 to 2019 | Population Change 2010 to 2019 | Population Change 2018 to 2019 | Annual Growth Rate (in percent) 2010 to 2019 | Annual Growth Rate (in percent) 2018 to 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Alaska** | **710,231** | **722,262** | **730,649** | **736,077** | **736,416** | **736,989** | **739,649** | **737,783** | **734,055** | **731,007** | **63,183** | **5,260** | **-42,407** | **-8,308** | **20,776** | **-3,048** | **0.31** | **-0.42** |
| **Anchorage/Mat-Su Region** | **380,821** | **387,303** | **391,767** | **396,899** | **398,151** | **398,597** | **401,582** | **402,110** | **399,902** | **398,283** | **34,220** | **2,829** | **-16,758** | **-4,448** | **17,462** | **-1,619** | **0.48** | **-0.41** |
| Anchorage, Municipality | 291,826 | 295,635 | 298,164 | 301,037 | 300,008 | 298,637 | 298,962 | 297,739 | 294,488 | 291,845 | 26,504 | 2,102 | -26,485 | -4,745 | 19 | -2,643 | 0 | -0.90 |
| Matanuska-Susitna Borough | 88,995 | 91,668 | 93,603 | 95,862 | 98,143 | 99,960 | 102,620 | 104,371 | 105,414 | 106,438 | 7,716 | 727 | 9,727 | 297 | 17,443 | 1,024 | 1.93 | 0.97 |
| **Gulf Coast Region** | **78,631** | **80,164** | **80,508** | **80,495** | **80,785** | **80,937** | **81,062** | **80,763** | **80,806** | **80,866** | **4,559** | **281** | **-2,324** | **-221** | **2,235** | **60** | **0.30** | **0.07** |
| Kenai Peninsula Borough | 55,400 | 56,497 | 56,597 | 56,873 | 57,392 | 57,666 | 58,034 | 58,105 | 58,285 | 58,367 | 2,643 | 171 | 324 | -89 | 2,967 | 82 | 0.56 | 0.14 |
| Kodiak Island Borough | 13,592 | 13,835 | 13,974 | 13,813 | 13,799 | 13,747 | 13,531 | 13,261 | 13,099 | 13,001 | 1,331 | 75 | -1,922 | -173 | -591 | -98 | -0.48 | -0.75 |
| Valdez-Cordova CA | 9,639 | 9,832 | 9,937 | 9,809 | 9,594 | 9,524 | 9,497 | 9,397 | 9,422 | 9,498 | 585 | 35 | -726 | 41 | -141 | 76 | -0.16 | 0.80 |
| **Interior Region** | **112,021** | **112,852** | **115,352** | **114,552** | **113,019** | **112,888** | **113,235** | **112,020** | **110,904** | **109,847** | **11,937** | **1,075** | **-14,111** | **-2,132** | **-2,174** | **-1,057** | **-0.21** | **-0.96** |
| Denali Borough | 1,826 | 1,835 | 1,846 | 1,780 | 1,777 | 1,775 | 1,871 | 1,834 | 1,821 | 1,860 | 99 | 15 | -65 | 24 | 34 | 39 | 0.20 | 2.12 |
| Fairbanks N Star Borough | 97,581 | 98,263 | 100,649 | 100,040 | 98,757 | 98,728 | 98,995 | 97,850 | 96,852 | 95,898 | 10,998 | 998 | -12,681 | -1,952 | -1,683 | -954 | -0.19 | -0.99 |
| Southeast Fairbanks CA | 7,026 | 7,103 | 7,191 | 7,083 | 6,976 | 6,895 | 6,921 | 6,980 | 6,956 | 6,891 | 588 | 40 | -723 | -105 | -135 | -65 | -0.21 | -0.94 |
| Yukon-Koyukuk CA | 5,588 | 5,651 | 5,666 | 5,649 | 5,509 | 5,490 | 5,448 | 5,356 | 5,275 | 5,198 | 252 | 22 | -642 | -99 | -390 | -77 | -0.78 | -1.47 |
| **Northern Region** | **26,445** | **26,927** | **27,260** | **27,545** | **27,486** | **27,783** | **27,780** | **27,716** | **27,627** | **27,432** | **3,651** | **303** | **-2,664** | **-498** | **987** | **-195** | **0.40** | **-0.71** |
| Nome Census Area | 9,492 | 9,711 | 9,844 | 9,868 | 9,962 | 10,020 | 10,040 | 9,994 | 9,954 | 9,831 | 1,343 | 91 | -1,004 | -214 | 339 | -123 | 0.38 | -1.24 |
| North Slope Borough | 9,430 | 9,577 | 9,707 | 9,872 | 9,729 | 9,889 | 9,804 | 9,866 | 9,906 | 9,886 | 1,108 | 106 | -652 | -126 | 456 | -20 | 0.51 | -0.20 |
| Northwest Arctic Borough | 7,523 | 7,639 | 7,709 | 7,805 | 7,795 | 7,874 | 7,936 | 7,856 | 7,767 | 7,715 | 1,200 | 106 | -1,008 | -158 | 192 | -52 | 0.27 | -0.67 |
| **Southeast Region** | **71,664** | **73,599** | **74,149** | **74,319** | **74,437** | **74,278** | **73,742** | **72,941** | **72,657** | **72,373** | **3,249** | **205** | **-2,540** | **-489** | **709** | **-284** | **0.11** | **-0.39** |
| Haines Borough | 2,508 | 2,612 | 2,613 | 2,531 | 2,551 | 2,492 | 2,464 | 2,458 | 2,472 | 2,516 | 31 | 8 | -23 | 36 | 8 | 44 | 0.03 | 1.76 |
| Hoonah-Angoon CA | 2,149 | 2,152 | 2,197 | 2,182 | 2,139 | 2,178 | 2,191 | 2,127 | 2,161 | 2,145 | 52 | 9 | -56 | -25 | -4 | -16 | -0.02 | -0.74 |
| Juneau, City and Borough | 31,275 | 32,336 | 32,659 | 32,941 | 32,999 | 33,128 | 32,705 | 32,301 | 32,177 | 31,986 | 1,772 | 145 | -1,061 | -336 | 711 | -191 | 0.24 | -0.60 |
| Ketchikan Gateway Borough | 13,477 | 13,724 | 13,894 | 13,836 | 13,889 | 13,822 | 13,754 | 13,785 | 13,798 | 13,739 | 650 | 37 | -388 | -96 | 262 | -59 | 0.21 | -0.43 |
| Petersburg Borough | 3,203 | 3,292 | 3,243 | 3,200 | 3,199 | 3,178 | 3,175 | 3,136 | 3,190 | 3,226 | 137 | -1 | -114 | 37 | 23 | 36 | 0.08 | 1.12 |
| Prince of Wales-Hyder CA | 6,172 | 6,460 | 6,463 | 6,513 | 6,515 | 6,516 | 6,444 | 6,380 | 6,228 | 6,194 | 237 | 2 | -215 | -36 | 22 | -34 | 0.04 | -0.55 |
| Sitka, City and Borough | 8,881 | 9,010 | 9,059 | 9,060 | 9,071 | 8,872 | 8,892 | 8,733 | 8,607 | 8,532 | 261 | 1 | -610 | -76 | -349 | -75 | -0.43 | -0.88 |
| Skagway Municipality | 968 | 964 | 957 | 982 | 1,038 | 1,044 | 1,071 | 1,089 | 1,085 | 1,095 | 54 | -3 | 73 | 13 | 127 | 10 | 1.33 | 0.92 |
| Wrangell, City and Borough | 2,369 | 2,408 | 2,443 | 2,455 | 2,413 | 2,444 | 2,456 | 2,389 | 2,418 | 2,400 | 16 | 4 | 15 | -22 | 31 | -18 | 0.14 | -0.75 |
| Yakutat, City and Borough | 662 | 641 | 621 | 619 | 623 | 604 | 590 | 543 | 521 | 540 | 39 | 3 | -161 | 16 | -122 | 19 | -2.19 | 3.58 |
| **Southwest Region** | **40,649** | **41,417** | **41,613** | **42,267** | **42,538** | **42,506** | **42,248** | **42,233** | **42,159** | **42,206** | **5,567** | **567** | **-4,010** | **-520** | **1,557** | **47** | **0.41** | **0.11** |
| Aleutians East Borough | 3,141 | 3,147 | 3,148 | 3,151 | 3,096 | 3,052 | 3,002 | 2,982 | 2,955 | 2,938 | 63 | -1 | -266 | -16 | -203 | -17 | -0.72 | -0.58 |
| Aleutians West Census Area | 5,561 | 5,521 | 5,608 | 5,621 | 5,594 | 5,514 | 5,466 | 5,348 | 5,321 | 5,579 | 181 | 22 | -163 | 236 | 18 | 258 | 0.03 | 4.73 |
| Bethel Census Area | 17,013 | 17,440 | 17,548 | 17,890 | 18,073 | 18,174 | 18,104 | 18,145 | 18,036 | 18,131 | 2,921 | 299 | -1,803 | -204 | 1,118 | 95 | 0.69 | 0.53 |
| Bristol Bay Borough | 997 | 1,023 | 983 | 933 | 943 | 887 | 875 | 892 | 877 | 869 | 25 | 4 | -153 | -12 | -128 | -8 | -1.48 | -0.92 |
| Dillingham Census Area | 4,847 | 4,935 | 4,978 | 5,025 | 5,063 | 5,008 | 4,958 | 4,925 | 5,007 | 4,887 | 600 | 54 | -560 | -174 | 40 | -120 | 0.09 | -2.43 |
| Kusilvak Census Area | 7,459 | 7,674 | 7,669 | 7,947 | 8,082 | 8,195 | 8,201 | 8,217 | 8,305 | 8,180 | 1,600 | 174 | -879 | -299 | 721 | -125 | 1.00 | -1.52 |
| Lake and Peninsula Borough | 1,631 | 1,677 | 1,679 | 1,700 | 1,687 | 1,676 | 1,642 | 1,724 | 1,658 | 1,622 | 177 | 15 | -186 | -51 | -9 | -36 | -0.06 | -2.20 |

**Notes:** Vintage 2019. All numbers are based on 2019 geography. Natural increase is births minus deaths. Net migration is in-migrants minus out-migrants.
**Source:** Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section