



Caring for Alaska's Animals

Long distances and an often unusual animal population

By **ALYSSA RODRIGUES**

At first glance, animal care employment in Alaska looks a lot like it does in the rest of the country. With a similar mix of veterinarians, groomers, and pet store workers, it's a comparably small slice of Alaska's total job count. But Alaska often differs in what its animals need and what it takes to reach them.

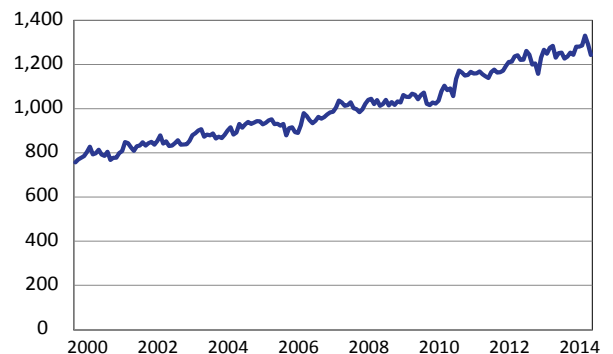
Alaska's domestic animals include the typical dogs and cats but also — most notably — the sled dogs for which we're famous. We also have yaks, reindeer, and other exotic livestock you'd be much less likely to find in the Lower 48.

With such a diverse animal population, Alaska's animal care professionals develop a broad range of skills and experience — they may be faced with a sick pet mouse one day and a pregnant bison or sled dog the next. They also cope with the demands of an extreme climate, and many workers travel around the state to provide care in remote areas with no local providers.

Just 14 of Alaska's 29 boroughs and census areas have paid animal care employment (see Exhibit 2). But volunteers provide a significant amount of care throughout the state and many animal owners learn to do for

1 Jobs on Upward Trajectory

ALASKA ANIMAL CARE, 2000 TO 2014



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

themselves what people in other parts of the country would pay a vet or groomer to do.

Although relatively small in number, animal care employment has steadily grown since 2000 (see Exhibit 1) and is expected to continue growing.



Above, sled dogs sleep in — and sometimes on — their hutches. Photo by Flickr user Skylar Primm



At left, a cat naps on a railing outside the Herring Bay Lumber Co. in Ketchikan. Photo by Flickr user Jeff Tabaco

A rugged life for sled dogs

Like their owners, many of Alaska’s animals lead a rougher life. With the ice and sometimes extreme cold, they’re more prone to injury and frostbite. Sharp salt crystals during ice melt can also be painful for dogs’ and cats’ sensitive paw pads.

Some dogs wear outdoor gear, just like humans do, including coats and booties to protect their feet. This is particularly necessary for sled dogs due to the long distances they run.

These high-performance dogs require more professional care than most, and each year during the Iditarod and Yukon Quest, veterinarians from inside and outside Alaska travel to the starting line and checkpoints to en-

sure dogs are healthy enough to race. Race vets check for injuries or pregnancy at the start of a race, and at checkpoints they look for signs of exhaustion or injured feet and shoulders. They also assess the dogs’ hydration, appetite, and mood.

When the dogs aren’t racing, mushers are often the main care providers. Many mushers have the skills necessary to maintain the health of their teams, and they sometimes work with their veterinarians to develop a health plan. In some cases, several kennels will form a partnership with a veterinarian.

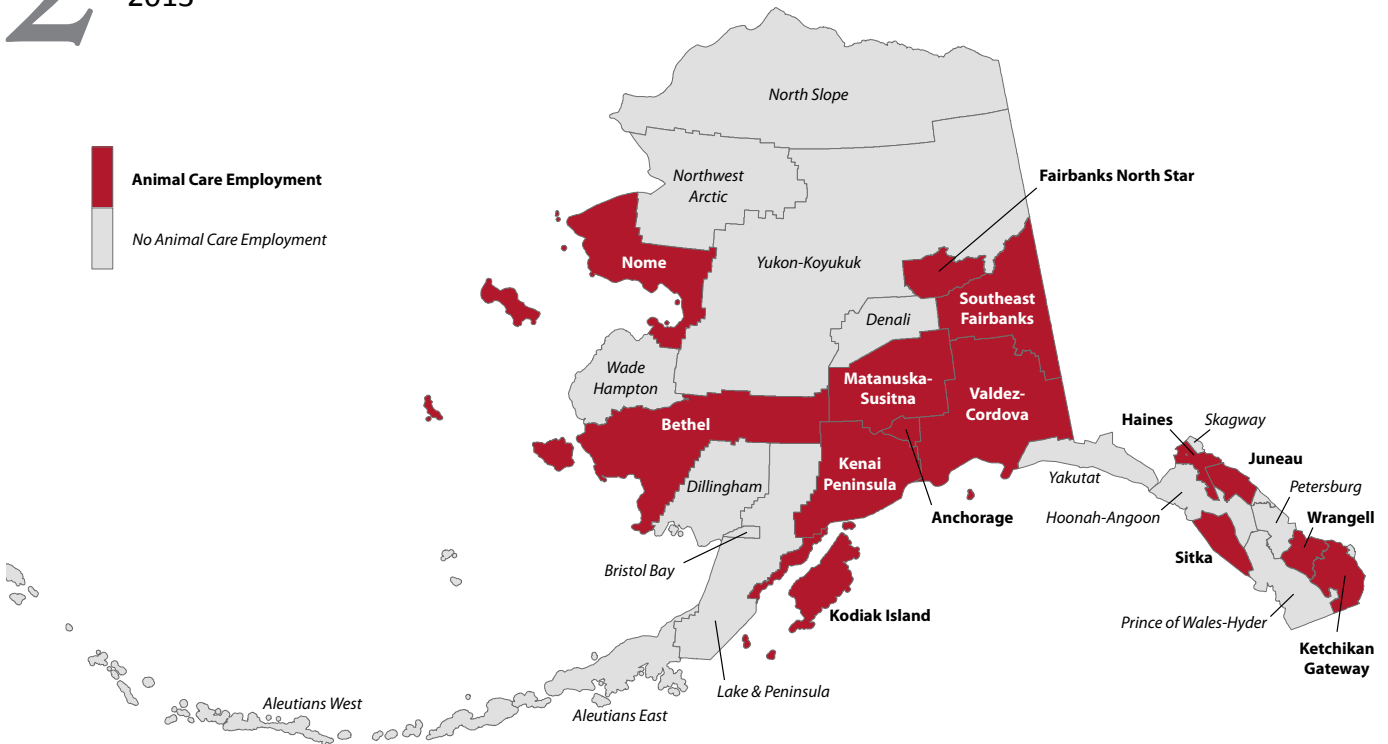
Rural animals sometimes travel

Like rural Alaskans, it’s typical for animals in rural areas

2

About Half of Alaska's Areas Have Animal Care Jobs

2013

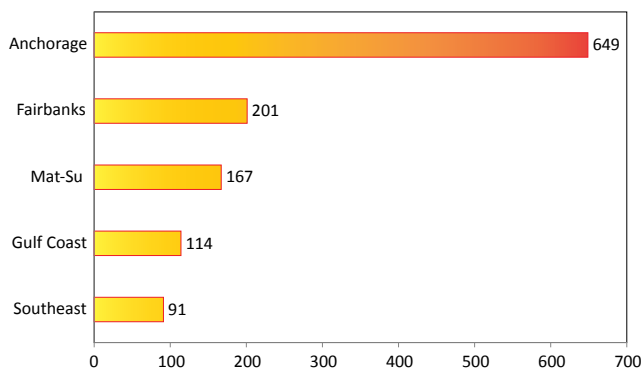


Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

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Most Jobs Are In Anchorage

ANIMAL CARE INDUSTRY, 2013



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

to travel to a hub community for care. Workers also fly in periodically to areas with no established care providers. Between visits, owners and volunteer agencies provide care.

When animals are severely injured or sick, they can be transported to Fairbanks or Anchorage for treatment. The state's two largest cities have the highest concentrations of animal care providers as well as the vast majority of the industry's total jobs. Anchorage has the most by far at 649 and Fairbanks has 201. (See Exhibit 3.)

Most jobs are in veterinary services

Veterinary services make up 57 percent of all animal care jobs. (See Exhibit 4.) In 2013, Alaska had 379 licensed veterinarians and 210 licensed veterinarian technicians. This category has grown steadily since 2000.

Veterinary practices also employ assistants

and laboratory animal caretakers. They can fill and administer prescriptions, examine animals for illness or injury, collect laboratory specimens, and monitor animals recovering from surgery. Like other types of animal caretakers, they also feed the animals and clean and disinfect kennels and work areas.

Of the job categories Exhibit 4 shows, veterinary services paid the most on average at \$34,415 in 2013. Veterinarians, who made the highest wages in the industry at \$94,440, were a big part of that higher average. (See Exhibit 5.)

Jobs in pet and pet supply stores made up about 25 percent of the industry. This category had also been growing since 2000, but its job level has held steady since 2012. These jobs paid an average of \$24,851.

Pet care services, which includes independent groomers and boarders and their support staff, is the smallest slice of the industry at 18 percent, but it grew the most in recent years. These jobs paid the least on average, at \$18,187 in 2013. This is largely because retail workers overall tend to make less per hour and are more likely to work part-time.

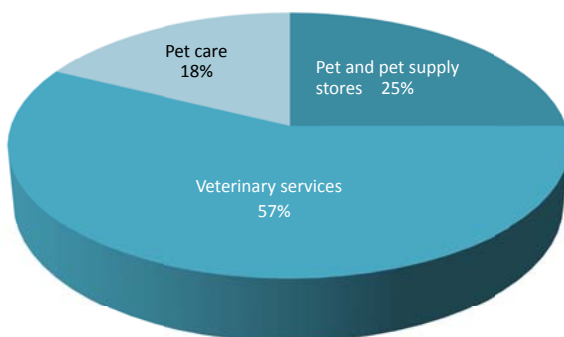
Notable but not included

Just as volunteers and the self-employed don't show up in these job numbers but play a major role in Alaska's animal care, several other types of animal care jobs are excluded from exhibits 1 through 4 because they're counted as part of government.

Animal control officers are best known for picking up strays but they also care for animals in their custody, arrange veterinary treatment, investigate reports of animal attacks and cruelty, prepare for court cases,

4 Mainly Veterinary Services

ANIMAL CARE INDUSTRY, 2013



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



These dogs, shown in the 2011 Iditarod, wear booties to protect their paws. Photo by Flickr user Mike Juvrud

and do public outreach on laws and regulations. Exhibits 5 and 6 give their average wages and projected occupational outlook. Alaska had about 50 animal control workers in 2012.

Other government animal care workers include the state veterinarian, those who work for government-run wildlife preserves such as the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center in Girdwood, and workers at the musk oxen farm at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Farm workers' employment is also counted elsewhere. Alaska isn't known for farming, but we do have small

Bringing animals to Alaska

There are some pets Alaskans just can't have. For example, it's illegal to domesticate wild animals or create wild-domestic hybrids. Some animals from out of state are also barred from entry. These restrictions protect Alaska's wildlife and human populations.

If domestic or domesticated hybrid animals got loose, they could out-compete the local wildlife for food or habitat. Some animals, such as sugar gliders (a small marsupial), are barred from entering Alaska because the risk of harm to the wildlife population is too high.

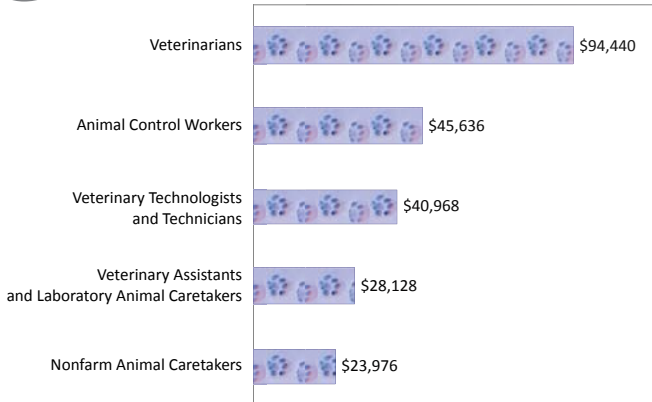
The accidental importation of ticks into Alaska is another major concern because of the diseases ticks carry.

Any animal coming to Alaska must have a health certificate that certifies the animal doesn't have any infectious or contagious diseases that could harm Alaska's wildlife or human populations.

Transporting animals to Alaska doesn't pose any additional health risks for the animals, but does pose additional complications due to distance and isolation.

5 Highest Wages for Vets

SELECT ANIMAL CARE JOBS, 2013



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

numbers of the cows, chickens, and pigs you'd find in the Lower 48 as well as farms that raise grouse, hares, elk, and other less common animals.

The industry will keep growing

Animal care employment in Alaska is projected to grow faster than average between 2012 and 2022. About 125 new jobs are projected and another 163 openings will be created as workers retire or leave the profession. (See Exhibit 6.)

Veterinary services is expected to grow the most. Although Alaska doesn't have a vet school, veterinary technicians can take vocational training in Juneau or earn a certificate in veterinary science through the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

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6 Projected Growth for Animal Care Jobs

SELECT ALASKA OCCUPATIONS, 2012 TO 2022

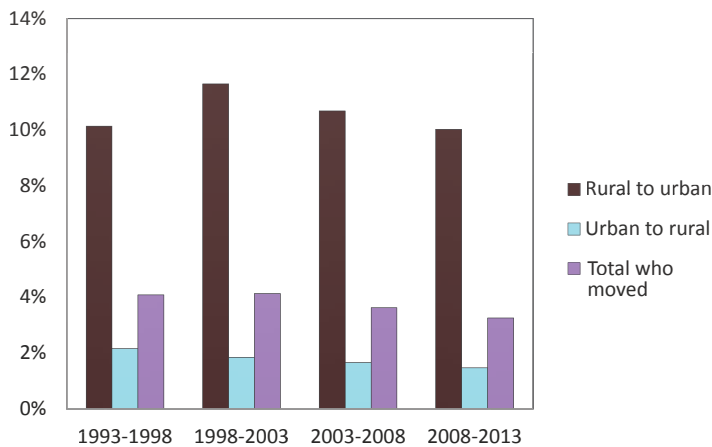
Occupation	2012 Jobs	2022 Jobs	Percent Growth	Job Growth
Animal Control Workers	52	53	2%	1
Veterinarians	125	146	17%	21
Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	162	192	19%	30
Veterinary Assistants and Lab Animal Caretakers	224	261	17%	37
Nonfarm Animal Caretakers	232	268	16%	36
Total Projected Growth	795	920	16%	125

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

RURAL AND URBAN MIGRATION

Where people move and how it affects their employment

1 Percent Who Migrated ALASKA, 5-YEAR INCREMENTS, 1993-2013



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

By **DAVID HOWELL**

The tendency for people to move from rural to urban areas can be seen all over the world, as people move to population hubs seeking jobs, higher wages, or education. This phenomenon is not new, and in Alaska, rural areas generally recoup these population losses through higher birth rates.

Alaska's rates of migration from rural to urban areas have remained fairly stable over the past 20 years. (See Exhibit 1.)

Over five-year periods, an average of 7,700 adults move from a rural to an urban area in the state, or about 11 percent of the rural population.

'Rural' encompasses more areas than usual for this article

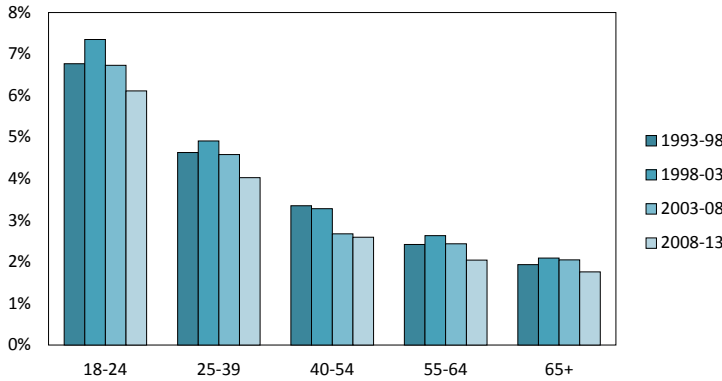
For this article, Alaska's urban areas are the five largest population centers: Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Juneau, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, and the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Together, these five areas are home to around 80 percent of the state's population. Though these areas encompass many small communities as well,

most of them are well-connected to the nearby cities.

"Rural" as used here refers to any place in Alaska outside these five areas. That means communities such as Ketchikan and Sitka, which are often considered urban in other contexts, are designated as rural for this article.

2 Younger People Migrate More

PERCENT WHO MIGRATED, BY AGE GROUP



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

But migration doesn't just happen in one direction. During the same five-year periods, an average of 4,400 urban residents relocated to a rural place, or about 2 percent of Alaska's urban population. That rate has also remained stable over the past 20 years.

It's important to note this article covers only those who moved between rural and urban areas within the state. Far more people move both in and out of Alaska each year or move from an urban to urban or rural to rural location.

Age patterns similar around the United States

Like the overall migration rates within the state, migration between rural and urban areas by age has been stable over the past 20 years. Movement between urban and rural areas follows the same age pattern here as it does nationwide, with young people moving at higher rates that taper as they age. (See Exhibit 2.)

Over the four periods, the two youngest age groups averaged 60 percent of all migrants but just 44 percent of the sample. The youngest age group was by far the most likely to move. Nearly 7 percent of all 18-to-24-year-olds moved between urban and rural Alaska during each of the five-year intervals.

Those in the two oldest age groups combined made up just under 12 percent of all migrants, but represented 20 percent of the sample.

How migrating affects finding employment

Though jobs factor in to many decisions to move, there wasn't a big difference in initial employment status for the movers between urban and rural Alaska, in either direction. On average, 4 percent of people *with* jobs and 3 percent of people *without* jobs moved over each of the four observed periods.

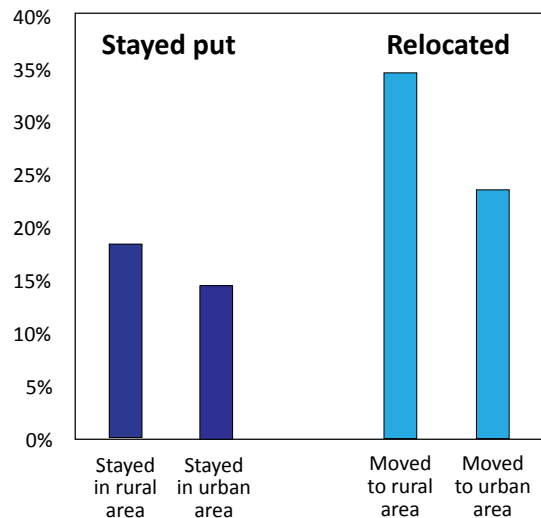
Among rural residents, 11 percent with jobs moved to an urban area while 9 percent of those without jobs moved. In urban areas, there was no difference in the percentage who moved based on employment status, at 2 percent for both.

Even though the migration of those with and without jobs is similar, migration affected the chances of finding a job for those without one, and this held true whether the move was rural-to-urban or urban-to-

3 Migrants More Likely to Find Jobs

NOT WORKING IN 2008 BUT EMPLOYED IN 2013

Percent working five years later



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

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Wages for Migrants and Those Who Didn't Move

ALASKA, 1993 TO 2013

		Stayed Urban	Stayed Rural	Urban to Rural	Rural to Urban
1993- 1998	Population	109,036	32,783	2,328	3,732
	1993 Wage	\$48,501	\$36,615	\$35,464	\$38,802
	1998 Wage	\$51,204	\$37,947	\$45,093	\$39,142
1998- 2003	Population	118,265	34,488	2,212	4,624
	1998 Wage	\$45,560	\$33,855	\$34,198	\$36,921
	2003 Wage	\$51,922	\$37,714	\$44,924	\$40,962
2003- 2008	Population	134,912	36,232	2,265	4,567
	2003 Wage	\$47,262	\$35,191	\$32,300	\$36,928
	2008 Wage	\$52,885	\$37,235	\$40,630	\$42,039
2008- 2013	Population	145,708	35,978	2,352	3,777
	2008 Wage	\$49,360	\$35,572	\$34,067	\$37,343
	2013 Wage	\$52,284	\$36,920	\$39,127	\$40,716

Note: Population and wages are only for those working in both of the years of each period examined. All wages are in 2013 dollars.

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

rural. (See Exhibit 3.)

Among those who weren't working in the initial year of each period, 35 percent who migrated were employed in the final year; for those who stayed put, it was 19 percent.

Workers who migrated were also slightly more likely to be employed in both the beginning and end of each period, at 54 percent versus 52 percent for those who didn't move. Overall, over half of the people in each age group who were younger than 55 at the start of the periods were working at both the beginning and the end.

In general, the percentage of people working in both years of each period increased with time, but particularly the two oldest.

Moving for higher wages

Just as moving can increase a person's chances of finding a job, people often move in search of better jobs and higher wages. Average wages in urban areas are higher than in rural areas and the gap is increasing — urban wages were 27 percent higher in 1993 and 38

About these numbers

For this article, we looked at wage record data and Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend applications to examine how moves relate to jobs and wages.

This article only includes people who were 18 or older and applied for a PFD in the beginning and ending years of each of four intervals (1993 to 1998, 1998 to 2003, 2003 to 2008, and 2008 to 2013). To become eligible for a PFD, a person must have lived in Alaska for the previous calendar year. Because of this requirement, many military service members and short-term workers were excluded.

For the wage analysis portion of the study, we matched all adult PFD applicants to records of workers covered by Alaska unemployment insurance. We calculated average earnings by dividing total earnings by the number of workers. This does not account for seasonality or whether a worker was full-time or part-time.

Finally, to get a better sense of real value, we inflation-adjusted all wages to 2013 dollars, based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index for Anchorage (CPI-U).

percent higher in 2013.

Wages for the people who were identified for this article as either moving or staying put grew across the board. Somewhat surprisingly, though, the largest wage gains were for the group who left an urban area to move to a rural area. Despite that group's average wage increase of 24 percent, they continued to make less than the group who stayed in urban areas. The smallest increases were for people who stayed in rural areas.

Wages and the likelihood of moving

People's relative earnings have a mixed effect on how likely they are to migrate. Rural residents earning higher-than-average wages were slightly more likely than others to move to an urban area. The reverse is true in urban areas, where residents making lower-than-average wages are slightly more likely to move to a rural area.

Overall, workers who didn't move earned more than workers who did, but the wage difference shrunk over time. The nonmovers earned 24 percent more at the start of the five-year periods and 18 percent more by the end.

The tendency for young people to move more gets some of the credit for the bump in movers' wages, as people get their biggest wage increases while young.

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