[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Redirect](/wiki/Template:Redirect) [Template:Pp-semi](/wiki/Template:Pp-semi) [Template:Pp-move-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-move-indef)

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**Alaska** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en)) is a [U.S. state](/wiki/U.S._state) situated in the northwest extremity of the [Americas](/wiki/Americas). The [Canadian administrative divisions](/wiki/Provinces_and_territories_of_Canada) of [British Columbia](/wiki/British_Columbia) and [Yukon](/wiki/Yukon) border the state to the east; it has a maritime border with [Russia](/wiki/Russia) to the west across the [Bering Strait](/wiki/Bering_Strait). To the north are the [Chukchi](/wiki/Chukchi_Sea) and [Beaufort](/wiki/Beaufort_Sea) seas–the southern parts of the [Arctic Ocean](/wiki/Arctic_Ocean). The [Pacific Ocean](/wiki/Pacific_Ocean) lies to the south and southwest. Alaska is the [largest state](/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_area) in the [United States](/wiki/United_States) by area, the [3rd least populous](/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_population) and the [least densely populated](/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_population_density) of the [50 United States](/wiki/List_of_U.S._states). Approximately half of Alaska's residents (the total estimated at 738,432 by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2015<ref name=PopEstUS/>) live within the [Anchorage metropolitan area](/wiki/Anchorage_metropolitan_area). Alaska's economy is dominated by the [fishing](/wiki/Fishing), [natural gas](/wiki/Natural_gas), and [oil](/wiki/Petroleum) industries, resources which it has in abundance. [Military](/wiki/United_States_Armed_Forces) bases and tourism are also a significant part of the [economy](/wiki/Economy_of_Alaska).

The United States [purchased Alaska](/wiki/Alaska_Purchase) from the [Russian Empire](/wiki/Russian_Empire) on March 30, 1867, for 7.2 million U.S. dollars at approximately two cents per acre ($4.74/km2). The area went through several administrative changes before becoming organized as a [territory](/wiki/Territories_of_the_United_States) on May 11, 1912. It was admitted as the 49th state of the U.S. on January 3, 1959.[[1]](#cite_note-1)

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## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

The name "Alaska" (Аляска) was introduced in the [Russian colonial period](/wiki/Russian_America) when it was used to refer to the [peninsula](/wiki/Alaska_Peninsula). It was derived from an [Aleut](/wiki/Aleut_language), or [Unangam](/wiki/Unangam) [idiom](/wiki/Idiom), which figuratively refers to the mainland of Alaska. Literally, it means *object to which the action of the sea is directed*.<ref name=Aleut>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book), at pp. 49 (Alaxsxi-x = mainland Alaska), 50 (*alagu-x* = *sea*), 508 (*-gi* = suffix, *object of its action*).</ref><ref name=Bright>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref>[[2]](#cite_note-2) It is also known as *Alyeska,* the "great land", an Aleut word derived from the same root.

## Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Alaska is the northernmost and westernmost state in the United States and has the most easterly longitude in the United States because the [Aleutian Islands](/wiki/Aleutian_Islands) extend into the [eastern hemisphere](/wiki/Eastern_hemisphere). Alaska is the only non-[contiguous](/wiki/Contiguous) U.S. state on continental North America; about [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of [British Columbia](/wiki/British_Columbia) (Canada) separates Alaska from [Washington](/wiki/Washington_(state)). It is technically part of the [continental U.S.](/wiki/Continental_United_States), but is sometimes not included in colloquial use; Alaska is not part of the contiguous U.S., often called ["the Lower 48"](/wiki/Outside_(Alaska)). The capital city, [Juneau](/wiki/Juneau), is situated on the mainland of the North American continent but is not connected by road to the rest of the North American highway system.

The state is bordered by [Yukon](/wiki/Yukon) and [British Columbia](/wiki/British_Columbia) in Canada, to the east, the [Gulf of Alaska](/wiki/Gulf_of_Alaska) and the [Pacific Ocean](/wiki/Pacific_Ocean) to the south and southwest, the [Bering Sea](/wiki/Bering_Sea), [Bering Strait](/wiki/Bering_Strait), and [Chukchi Sea](/wiki/Chukchi_Sea) to the west and the [Arctic Ocean](/wiki/Arctic_Ocean) to the north. Alaska's territorial waters touch Russia's territorial waters in the Bering Strait, as the Russian [Big Diomede Island](/wiki/Big_Diomede_Island) and Alaskan [Little Diomede Island](/wiki/Little_Diomede_Island) are only [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) apart. Alaska has a longer coastline than all the other U.S. states combined.[[3]](#cite_note-3) [thumb|Alaska's size compared with the](/wiki/File:Alaska_area_compared_to_conterminous_US.svg) [48 contiguous states](/wiki/Contiguous_United_States). ([Albers equal-area conic projection](/wiki/Albers_projection))

Alaska is the largest state in the United States in land area at [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), over twice the size of [Texas](/wiki/Texas), the next largest state. Alaska is larger than all but 18 sovereign countries. Counting territorial waters, Alaska is larger than the combined area of the next three largest states: Texas, [California](/wiki/California), and [Montana](/wiki/Montana). It is also larger than the combined area of the 22 smallest U.S. states.

### Regions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

There are no officially defined borders demarcating the various regions of Alaska, but there are six widely accepted regions:

#### South Central[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The most populous region of Alaska, containing [Anchorage](/wiki/Anchorage), the [Matanuska-Susitna Valley](/wiki/Matanuska-Susitna_Valley) and the [Kenai Peninsula](/wiki/Kenai_Peninsula). Rural, mostly unpopulated areas south of the [Alaska Range](/wiki/Alaska_Range) and west of the [Wrangell Mountains](/wiki/Wrangell_Mountains) also fall within the definition of South Central, as do the [Prince William Sound](/wiki/Prince_William_Sound) area and the communities of [Cordova](/wiki/Cordova,_Alaska) and [Valdez](/wiki/Valdez,_Alaska).

#### Southeast[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Also referred to as the Panhandle or Inside Passage, this is the region of Alaska closest to the rest of the United States. As such, this was where most of the initial non-indigenous settlement occurred in the years following the [Alaska Purchase](/wiki/Alaska_Purchase). The region is dominated by the [Alexander Archipelago](/wiki/Alexander_Archipelago) as well as the [Tongass National Forest](/wiki/Tongass_National_Forest), the largest national forest in the United States. It contains the state capital [Juneau](/wiki/Juneau), the former capital [Sitka](/wiki/Sitka,_Alaska), and [Ketchikan](/wiki/Ketchikan), at one time Alaska's largest city.[[4]](#cite_note-4) The [Alaska Marine Highway](/wiki/Alaska_Marine_Highway) provides a vital surface transportation link throughout the area, as only three communities ([Haines](/wiki/Haines,_Alaska), [Hyder](/wiki/Hyder,_Alaska) and [Skagway](/wiki/Skagway,_Alaska)) enjoy direct connections to the contiguous North American road system.

#### Interior[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|](/wiki/File:Denali_Mt_McKinley.jpg)[Denali](/wiki/Denali) is the highest peak in North America. The Interior is the largest region of Alaska; much of it is uninhabited wilderness. [Fairbanks](/wiki/Fairbanks,_Alaska) is the only large city in the region. [Denali National Park and Preserve](/wiki/Denali_National_Park_and_Preserve) is located here. [*Denali*](/wiki/Denali) is the highest mountain in North America.

#### Southwest[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|right|upright|](/wiki/File:Grizzly_Bear_Fishing_Brooks_Falls.jpg)[Grizzly bear](/wiki/Grizzly_bear) fishing for [salmon](/wiki/Salmon) at [Brooks Falls](/wiki/Brooks_Falls), part of [Katmai National Park and Preserve](/wiki/Katmai_National_Park_and_Preserve).

Southwest Alaska is a sparsely inhabited region stretching some [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) inland from the Bering Sea. Most of the population lives along the coast. [Kodiak Island](/wiki/Kodiak_Island) is also located in Southwest. The massive [Yukon–Kuskokwim Delta](/wiki/Yukon–Kuskokwim_Delta), one of the largest river deltas in the world, is here. Portions of the [Alaska Peninsula](/wiki/Alaska_Peninsula) are considered part of Southwest, with the remaining portions included with the Aleutian Islands (see below).

#### North Slope[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The North Slope is mostly [tundra](/wiki/Tundra) peppered with small villages. The area is known for its massive reserves of crude oil, and contains both the [National Petroleum Reserve–Alaska](/wiki/National_Petroleum_Reserve–Alaska) and the [Prudhoe Bay Oil Field](/wiki/Prudhoe_Bay_Oil_Field).[[5]](#cite_note-5) [Barrow](/wiki/Barrow,_Alaska), the northernmost city in the United States, is located here. The [Northwest Arctic area](/wiki/Northwest_Arctic_Borough,_Alaska), anchored by [Kotzebue](/wiki/Kotzebue,_Alaska) and also containing the [Kobuk River](/wiki/Kobuk_River) valley, is often regarded as being part of this region. However, the respective [Inupiat](/wiki/Inupiat_people) of the North Slope and of the Northwest Arctic seldom consider themselves to be one people[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed).

#### Aleutian Islands[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) More than 300 small volcanic islands make up this chain, which stretches over [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) into the Pacific Ocean. Some of these islands fall in the Eastern Hemisphere, but the [International Date Line](/wiki/International_Date_Line) was drawn west of [180°](/wiki/180th_meridian) to keep the whole state, and thus the entire North American continent, within the same legal day. Two of the islands, [Attu](/wiki/Attu_Island) and [Kiska](/wiki/Kiska), were occupied by Japanese forces during World War II.

### Natural features[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) [thumb|](/wiki/File:Augustine_Volcano_Jan_12_2006_edited-1.jpg)[Augustine Volcano](/wiki/Augustine_Volcano) erupting on January 12, 2006

With its myriad islands, Alaska has nearly [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of tidal shoreline. The [Aleutian Islands](/wiki/Aleutian_Islands) chain extends west from the southern tip of the [Alaska Peninsula](/wiki/Alaska_Peninsula). Many active [volcanoes](/wiki/Volcano) are found in the Aleutians and in coastal regions. [Unimak Island](/wiki/Unimak_Island), for example, is home to [Mount Shishaldin](/wiki/Mount_Shishaldin), which is an occasionally smoldering volcano that rises to [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) above the North Pacific. It is the most perfect volcanic cone on Earth, even more symmetrical than Japan's [Mount Fuji](/wiki/Mount_Fuji). The chain of volcanoes extends to [Mount Spurr](/wiki/Mount_Spurr), west of Anchorage on the mainland. Geologists have identified Alaska as part of [Wrangellia](/wiki/Wrangellia), a large region consisting of multiple states and Canadian provinces in the [Pacific Northwest](/wiki/Pacific_Northwest), which is actively undergoing [continent building](/wiki/Plate_tectonics).

One of the world's largest tides occurs in [Turnagain Arm](/wiki/Turnagain_Arm), just south of Anchorage – tidal differences can be more than [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).[[6]](#cite_note-6) [Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Alaska has more than three million lakes.[[7]](#cite_note-7) [Marshlands](/wiki/Marshland) and wetland [permafrost](/wiki/Permafrost) cover [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) (mostly in northern, western and southwest flatlands). Glacier ice covers some [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of land and [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of tidal zone. The [Bering Glacier](/wiki/Bering_Glacier) complex near the southeastern border with Yukon covers [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) alone. With over 100,000 glaciers, Alaska has half of all in the world.

### Land ownership[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[thumb|Alaska has more public land owned by the federal government than any other state.](/wiki/File:Public-Lands-Western-US.png)[[8]](#cite_note-8)

According to an October 1998 report by the [United States Bureau of Land Management](/wiki/United_States_Bureau_of_Land_Management), approximately 65% of Alaska is owned and managed by the [U.S. federal government](/wiki/Federal_government_of_the_United_States) as public lands, including a multitude of [national forests](/wiki/United_States_National_Forest), national parks, and [national wildlife refuges](/wiki/National_wildlife_refuge).[[9]](#cite_note-9) Of these, the [Bureau of Land Management](/wiki/Bureau_of_Land_Management) manages [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), or 23.8% of the state. The [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](/wiki/Arctic_National_Wildlife_Refuge) is managed by the [United States Fish and Wildlife Service](/wiki/United_States_Fish_and_Wildlife_Service). It is the world's largest wildlife refuge, comprising [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).

Of the remaining land area, the state of Alaska owns [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), its entitlement under the [Alaska Statehood Act](/wiki/Alaska_Statehood_Act). A portion of that acreage is occasionally ceded to organized boroughs, under the statutory provisions pertaining to newly formed boroughs. Smaller portions are set aside for rural subdivisions and other homesteading-related opportunities. These are not very popular due to the often remote and roadless locations. The [University of Alaska](/wiki/University_of_Alaska), as a [land grant university](/wiki/Land_grant_university), also owns substantial acreage which it manages independently.

Another [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) are owned by 12 regional, and scores of local, Native corporations created under the [Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act](/wiki/Alaska_Native_Claims_Settlement_Act) (ANCSA) of 1971. [Regional Native corporation](/wiki/Alaska_Native_Regional_Corporation) [Doyon, Limited](/wiki/Doyon,_Limited) often promotes itself as the largest private landowner in Alaska in advertisements and other communications. Provisions of ANCSA allowing the corporations' land holdings to be sold on the open market starting in 1991 were repealed before they could take effect. Effectively, the corporations hold title (including subsurface title in many cases, a privilege denied to individual Alaskans) but cannot sell the land. [Individual Native allotments](/wiki/Alaska_Native_Allotment_Act) can be and are sold on the open market, however.

Various private interests own the remaining land, totaling about one percent of the state. Alaska is, by a large margin, the state with the smallest percentage of private land ownership when Native corporation holdings are excluded.

### Climate[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|Alaska map of Köppen climate classification.](/wiki/File:Alaska_map_of_Köppen_climate_classification.svg) [thumb|Map depicting the climate zones of Alaska.](/wiki/File:Alaska_climate_regions_USGS.gif)

The climate in Southeast Alaska is a mid-latitude [oceanic climate](/wiki/Oceanic_climate) ([Köppen climate classification](/wiki/Köppen_climate_classification): *Cfb*) in the southern sections and a subarctic oceanic climate (Köppen *Cfc*) in the northern parts. On an annual basis, Southeast is both the wettest and warmest part of Alaska with milder temperatures in the winter and high precipitation throughout the year. Juneau averages over [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of precipitation a year, and [Ketchikan](/wiki/Ketchikan,_Alaska) averages over [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).[[10]](#cite_note-10) This is also the only region in Alaska in which the average daytime high temperature is above freezing during the winter months.

The climate of [Anchorage](/wiki/Anchorage,_Alaska) and south central Alaska is mild by Alaskan standards due to the region's proximity to the seacoast. While the area gets less rain than southeast Alaska, it gets more snow, and days tend to be clearer. On average, [Anchorage](/wiki/Anchorage,_Alaska) receives [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of precipitation a year, with around [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of snow, although there are areas in the south central which receive far more snow. It is a subarctic climate ([Köppen: *Dfc*](/wiki/Köppen_climate_classification#GROUP_D:_Continental/microthermal_climate)) due to its brief, cool summers.

The climate of [Western Alaska](/wiki/Southwest_Alaska) is determined in large part by the [Bering Sea](/wiki/Bering_Sea) and the [Gulf of Alaska](/wiki/Gulf_of_Alaska). It is a subarctic oceanic climate in the southwest and a continental subarctic climate farther north. The temperature is somewhat moderate considering how far north the area is. This [region](/wiki/Region) has a tremendous amount of variety in precipitation. An area stretching from the northern side of the Seward Peninsula to the [Kobuk River](/wiki/Kobuk_River) valley (i. e., the region around [Kotzebue Sound](/wiki/Kotzebue_Sound)) is technically a [desert](/wiki/Desert), with portions receiving less than [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of precipitation annually. On the other extreme, some locations between [Dillingham](/wiki/Dillingham,_Alaska) and [Bethel](/wiki/Bethel,_Alaska) average around [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of precipitation.[[11]](#cite_note-11) The climate of the interior of Alaska is subarctic. Some of the highest and lowest temperatures in Alaska occur around the area near [Fairbanks](/wiki/Fairbanks,_Alaska). The summers may have temperatures reaching into the 90s °F (the low-to-mid 30s °C), while in the winter, the temperature can fall below [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). Precipitation is sparse in the Interior, often less than [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) a year, but what precipitation falls in the winter tends to stay the entire [winter](/wiki/Winter).

The highest and lowest recorded temperatures in Alaska are both in the Interior. The highest is [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in [Fort Yukon](/wiki/Fort_Yukon,_Alaska) (which is just [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) inside the arctic circle) on June 27, 1915,[[12]](#cite_note-12)<ref name=DRI>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref> making Alaska tied with Hawaii as the state with the lowest high temperature in the United States.[[13]](#cite_note-13)[[14]](#cite_note-14) The lowest official Alaska temperature is [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) in [Prospect Creek](/wiki/Prospect_Creek,_Alaska) on January 23, 1971,[[12]](#cite_note-12)<ref name=DRI/> one degree above the lowest temperature recorded in continental North America (in [Snag, Yukon, Canada](/wiki/Snag,_Yukon)).[[15]](#cite_note-15) The climate in the extreme north of Alaska is [Arctic](/wiki/Polar_climate) ([Köppen: *ET*](/wiki/Köppen_climate_classification#GROUP_E:_Polar_climates)) with long, very cold winters and short, cool summers. Even in July, the average low temperature in [Barrow](/wiki/Barrow,_Alaska) is [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).[[16]](#cite_note-16) Precipitation is light in this part of Alaska, with many places averaging less than [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) per year, mostly as snow which stays on the ground almost the entire year.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Average daily maximum and minimum temperatures for selected locations in Alaska[[17]](#cite_note-17) | | | | |
| **Location** | **July (°F)** | **July (°C)** | **January (°F)** | **January (°C)** |
| [Anchorage](/wiki/Anchorage,_Alaska) | 65/51 | 18/10 | 22/11 | –5/–11 |
| [Juneau](/wiki/Juneau,_Alaska) | 64/50 | 17/11 | 32/23 | 0/–4 |
| [Ketchikan](/wiki/Ketchikan,_Alaska) | 64/51 | 17/11 | 38/28 | 3/–1 |
| [Unalaska](/wiki/Unalaska,_Alaska) | 57/46 | 14/8 | 36/28 | 2/–2 |
| [Fairbanks](/wiki/Fairbanks,_Alaska) | 72/53 | 22/11 | 1/–17 | –17/–27 |
| [Fort Yukon](/wiki/Fort_Yukon,_Alaska) | 73/51 | 23/10 | –11/–27 | –23/–33 |
| [Nome](/wiki/Nome,_Alaska) | 58/46 | 14/8 | 13/–2 | –10/–19 |
| [Barrow](/wiki/Barrow,_Alaska) | 47/34 | 8/1 | –7/–19 | –21/–28 |

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main)

### Alaska Natives[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|right|upright|A modern](/wiki/File:AlutiiqDancer.jpg) [Alutiiq](/wiki/Alutiiq_people) dancer in traditional festival garb.

Numerous indigenous peoples occupied Alaska for thousands of years before the arrival of European peoples to the area. Linguistic and DNA studies done here have provided evidence for the settlement of North America by way of the [Bering land bridge](/wiki/Bering_land_bridge).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) The [Tlingit people](/wiki/Tlingit_people) developed a society with a [matrilineal](/wiki/Matrilineal) kinship system of property inheritance and descent in what is today Southeast Alaska, along with parts of British Columbia and the Yukon. Also in Southeast were the [Haida](/wiki/Haida_people), now well known for their unique arts. The [Tsimshian](/wiki/Tsimshian) people came to Alaska from British Columbia in 1887, when President [Grover Cleveland](/wiki/Grover_Cleveland), and later the U.S. Congress, granted them permission to settle on [Annette Island](/wiki/Annette_Island) and found the town of [Metlakatla](/wiki/Metlakatla,_Alaska). All three of these peoples, as well as other [indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast](/wiki/Indigenous_peoples_of_the_Pacific_Northwest_Coast), experienced [smallpox](/wiki/Smallpox) outbreaks from the late 18th through the mid-19th century, with the most devastating [epidemics](/wiki/Epidemics) occurring in the 1830s and 1860s, resulting in high fatalities and social disruption.[[18]](#cite_note-18) The Aleutian Islands are still home to the [Aleut people's](/wiki/Aleut_people) seafaring society, although they were the first Native Alaskans to be exploited by Russians. Western and Southwestern Alaska are home to the [Yup'ik](/wiki/Yup'ik), while their cousins the [Alutiiq ~ Sugpiaq](/wiki/Alutiiq_people) lived in what is now Southcentral Alaska. The [Gwich'in people](/wiki/Gwich'in_people) of the northern Interior region are [Athabaskan](/wiki/Alaskan_Athabaskans) and primarily known today for their dependence on the caribou within the much-contested [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](/wiki/Arctic_National_Wildlife_Refuge). The North Slope and [Little Diomede Island](/wiki/Little_Diomede_Island) are occupied by the widespread [Inupiat people](/wiki/Inupiat_people).

### Colonization[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Some researchers believe that the first Russian settlement in Alaska was established in the 17th century.[[19]](#cite_note-19) According to this hypothesis, in 1648 several [koches](/wiki/Koch_(boat)) of [Semyon Dezhnyov's](/wiki/Semyon_Dezhnyov) expedition came ashore in Alaska by storm and founded this settlement. This hypothesis is based on the testimony of [Chukchi](/wiki/Chukchi_people) geographer [Nikolai Daurkin](/wiki/Nikolai_Daurkin), who had visited Alaska in 1764–1765 and who had reported on a village on the [Kheuveren](/wiki/Kheuveren) River, populated by "bearded men" who "pray to the [icons](/wiki/Icons)". Some modern researchers associate Kheuveren with [Koyuk River](/wiki/Koyuk_River).[[20]](#cite_note-20) [thumb|The Russian settlement of St. Paul's Harbor (present-day](/wiki/File:Russian_Sloop-of-War_Neva.jpg) [Kodiak town](/wiki/Kodiak,_Alaska)), [Kodiak Island](/wiki/Kodiak_Island), 1814.

The first European vessel to reach Alaska is generally held to be the *St. Gabriel* under the authority of the surveyor [M. S. Gvozdev](/wiki/Mikhail_Gvozdev) and assistant navigator [I. Fyodorov](/wiki/Ivan_Fyodorov_(navigator)) on August 21, 1732 during an expedition of Siberian cossak [A. F. Shestakov](/wiki/Afanasiy_Shestakov) and Belorussian explorer [Dmitry Pavlutsky](/wiki/Dmitry_Pavlutsky) (1729—1735).[[21]](#cite_note-21) Another European contact with Alaska occurred in 1741, when [Vitus Bering](/wiki/Vitus_Bering) led an [expedition](/wiki/Second_Kamchatka_expedition) for the Russian Navy aboard the *St. Peter*. After his crew returned to Russia with [sea otter](/wiki/Sea_otter) pelts judged to be the finest fur in the world, small associations of fur traders began to sail from the shores of Siberia toward the Aleutian Islands. The first permanent European settlement was founded in 1784.

Between 1774 and 1800, [Spain](/wiki/Viceroyalty_of_New_Spain) sent several [expeditions to Alaska](/wiki/Spanish_expeditions_to_the_Pacific_Northwest) in order to assert its claim over the Pacific Northwest. In 1789 a Spanish settlement and [fort](/wiki/Fort_San_Miguel) were built in [Nootka Sound](/wiki/Nootka_Sound). These expeditions gave names to places such as [Valdez](/wiki/Valdez,_Alaska), [Bucareli Sound](/wiki/Bucareli_Sound), and [Cordova](/wiki/Cordova,_Alaska). Later, the [Russian-American Company](/wiki/Russian-American_Company) carried out an expanded colonization program during the early-to-mid-19th century.

[Sitka](/wiki/Sitka,_Alaska), renamed [New Archangel](/wiki/New_Archangel) from 1804 to 1867, on [Baranof Island](/wiki/Baranof_Island) in the [Alexander Archipelago](/wiki/Alexander_Archipelago) in what is now [Southeast Alaska](/wiki/Southeast_Alaska), became the capital of [Russian America](/wiki/Russian_America). It remained the capital after the colony was transferred to the United States. The Russians never fully colonized Alaska, and the colony was never very profitable. Evidence of Russian settlement in names and churches survive throughout southeast Alaska.

[William H. Seward](/wiki/William_H._Seward), the [United States Secretary of State](/wiki/United_States_Secretary_of_State), negotiated the [Alaska Purchase](/wiki/Alaska_Purchase) (also known as Seward's Folly) with the Russians in 1867 for $7.2 million. Alaska was loosely governed by the military initially, and was administered as a [district](/wiki/District_of_Alaska) starting in 1884, with a governor appointed by the [President of the United States](/wiki/President_of_the_United_States). A federal [district court](/wiki/United_States_territorial_court) was headquartered in Sitka.

[thumb|Miners and prospectors climb the](/wiki/File:Miners_climb_Chilkoot.jpg) [Chilkoot Trail](/wiki/Chilkoot_Trail) during the 1898 [Klondike Gold Rush](/wiki/Klondike_Gold_Rush).

For most of Alaska's first decade under the United States flag, Sitka was the only community inhabited by American settlers. They organized a "provisional city government," which was Alaska's first municipal government, but not in a legal sense.[[22]](#cite_note-22) Legislation allowing Alaskan communities to legally incorporate as cities did not come about until 1900, and [home rule](/wiki/Home_rule#Home_rule_in_the_United_States) for cities was extremely limited or unavailable until statehood took effect in 1959.

### U.S. Territory[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Starting in the 1890s and stretching in some places to the early 1910s, [gold rushes](/wiki/Alaska_Gold_Rush) in Alaska and the nearby [Yukon Territory](/wiki/Yukon) brought thousands of miners and settlers to Alaska. Alaska was officially incorporated as an organized territory in 1912. Alaska's capital, which had been in [Sitka](/wiki/Sitka,_Alaska) until 1906, was moved north to [Juneau](/wiki/Juneau,_Alaska). Construction of the [Alaska Governor's Mansion](/wiki/Alaska_Governor's_Mansion) began that same year. European immigrants from Norway and Sweden also settled in southeast Alaska, where they entered the fishing and logging industries.

[thumb|U.S. troops navigate snow and ice during the](/wiki/File:US_troops_at_the_Battle_of_Attu.jpg) [Battle of Attu](/wiki/Battle_of_Attu) in May 1943.

During World War II, the [Aleutian Islands Campaign](/wiki/Aleutian_Islands_Campaign) focused on the three outer Aleutian Islands – [Attu](/wiki/Attu_Island), [Agattu](/wiki/Agattu) and [Kiska](/wiki/Kiska_Island)[[23]](#cite_note-23) – that were invaded by Japanese troops and occupied between June 1942 and August 1943. [Unalaska](/wiki/Unalaska)/[Dutch Harbor](/wiki/Dutch_Harbor) became a significant base for the [U.S. Army Air Forces](/wiki/U.S._Army_Air_Forces) and [Navy](/wiki/U.S._Navy) [submariners](/wiki/Submarine).

The U.S. [Lend-Lease](/wiki/Lend-Lease) program involved the flying of American warplanes through Canada to Fairbanks and thence Nome; Soviet pilots took possession of these aircraft, ferrying them to fight the German invasion of the Soviet Union. The construction of military bases contributed to the population growth of some Alaskan cities.

### Statehood[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Statehood for Alaska was an important cause of [James Wickersham](/wiki/James_Wickersham) early in his tenure as a congressional delegate. Decades later, the statehood movement gained its first real momentum following a territorial referendum in 1946. The Alaska Statehood Committee and Alaska's Constitutional Convention would soon follow. Statehood supporters also found themselves fighting major battles against political foes, mostly in the U.S. Congress but also within Alaska. Statehood was approved by Congress on July 7, 1958. Alaska was officially proclaimed a state on January 3, 1959.

[thumb|left|upright|Kodiak, before and after the](/wiki/File:1964_Alaska_Quake_Kodiak_Before_and_After.jpg) [tsunami](/wiki/Tsunami) which followed the [Good Friday](/wiki/Good_Friday) earthquake in 1964, destroying much of the townsite.

In 1960, the Census Bureau reported Alaska's population as 77.2% White, 3% Black, and 18.8% American Indian and Alaska Native.[[24]](#cite_note-24) On March 27, 1964, the massive [Good Friday earthquake](/wiki/1964_Alaska_earthquake) killed 133 people and destroyed several villages and portions of large coastal communities, mainly by the resultant [tsunamis](/wiki/Tsunamis) and landslides. It was the [second-most-powerful earthquake](/wiki/Largest_earthquakes_by_magnitude) in the recorded history of the world, with a [moment magnitude](/wiki/Moment_magnitude_scale) of 9.2. It was over one thousand times more powerful than the [1989 San Francisco earthquake](/wiki/1989_Loma_Prieta_earthquake). The time of day (5:36 pm), time of year and location of the epicenter were all cited as factors in potentially sparing thousands of lives, particularly in Anchorage.

The 1968 discovery of oil at [Prudhoe Bay](/wiki/Prudhoe_Bay) and the 1977 completion of the [Trans-Alaska Pipeline System](/wiki/Trans-Alaska_Pipeline_System) led to an oil boom. Royalty revenues from oil have funded large state budgets from 1980 onward. That same year, not coincidentally, Alaska repealed its state income tax.

In 1989, the [*Exxon Valdez*](/wiki/Exxon_Valdez) hit a reef in the [Prince William Sound](/wiki/Prince_William_Sound), spilling over [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of crude oil over [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of coastline. Today, the battle between philosophies of development and conservation is seen in the contentious debate over oil drilling in the [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](/wiki/Arctic_National_Wildlife_Refuge) and the proposed [Pebble Mine](/wiki/Pebble_Mine).

### Alaska Heritage Resources Survey[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

The Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) is a restricted [inventory](/wiki/Inventory) of all reported [historic](/wiki/Historic_site) and [prehistoric](/wiki/Prehistoric) sites within the state of Alaska; it is maintained by the Office of History and Archaeology. The survey's inventory of cultural resources includes objects, structures, buildings, sites, districts, and travel ways, with a general provision that they are over 50 years old. As of January 31, 2012, over 35,000 sites have been reported.[[25]](#cite_note-25)

## Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [Template:US Census population](/wiki/Template:US_Census_population)

The [United States Census Bureau](/wiki/United_States_Census_Bureau) estimates that the population of Alaska was 738,432 on July 1, 2015, a 3.97% increase since the [2010 United States Census](/wiki/2010_United_States_Census).<ref name=PopEstUS>[Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web)</ref>

In 2010, Alaska ranked as the 47th state by population, ahead of [North Dakota](/wiki/North_Dakota), [Vermont](/wiki/Vermont), and [Wyoming](/wiki/Wyoming) (and [Washington, D.C.](/wiki/Washington,_D.C.))<ref name=PopEstUS/> Alaska is the least densely populated state, and one of the most sparsely populated areas in the world, at [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert), with the next state, Wyoming, at [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert).[[26]](#cite_note-26) Alaska is the largest U.S. state by [area](/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_area), and the tenth wealthiest (per capita income).[[27]](#cite_note-27) As of November 2014, the state's unemployment rate was 6.6%.[[28]](#cite_note-28)

### Race and ancestry[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

According to the [2010 United States Census](/wiki/2010_United_States_Census), Alaska had a population of 710,231. In terms of race and ethnicity, the state was 66.7% [White](/wiki/White_American) (64.1% Non-Hispanic [White](/wiki/Non-Hispanic_Whites)), 14.8% [American Indian](/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) and Alaska Native, 5.4% [Asian](/wiki/Asian_American), 3.3% [Black](/wiki/African_American) or African American, 1.0% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 1.6% from Some Other Race, and 7.3% from Two or More Races. [Hispanics](/wiki/Hispanic_and_Latino_Americans) or Latinos of any race made up 5.5% of the population.[[29]](#cite_note-29) [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of), 50.7% of Alaska's population younger than one year of age belonged to minority groups (i.e., did not have two parents of non-Hispanic white ancestry).[[30]](#cite_note-30)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Alaska Racial Breakdown of Population** | | | | |
| **Racial composition** | **1970**[**[31]**](#cite_note-31) | **1990**[**[31]**](#cite_note-31) | **2000**[**[32]**](#cite_note-32) | **2010**[**[33]**](#cite_note-33) |
| [White](/wiki/White_American) | 78.8% | 75.5% | 69.3% | 66.7% |
| [Native](/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) | 16.9% | 15.6% | 15.6% | 14.8% |
| [Asian](/wiki/Asian_American) | 0.9% | 3.6% | 4.0% | 5.4% |
| [Black](/wiki/African_American) | 3.0% | 4.1% | 3.5% | 3.3% |
| [Native Hawaiian](/wiki/Native_Hawaiian) and  [other Pacific Islander](/wiki/Pacific_Islander) | – | – | 0.5% | 1.0% |
| [Other race](/wiki/Race_and_ethnicity_in_the_United_States_Census) | 0.4% | 1.2% | 1.6% | 1.6% |
| [Two or more races](/wiki/Multiracial_American) | – | – | 5.5% | 7.3% |

### Languages[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further) According to the 2011 [American Community Survey](/wiki/American_Community_Survey), 82.4% of people over the age of five speak only English at home. About 3.5% speak Spanish at home. About 2.2% speak another [Indo-European language](/wiki/Indo-European_languages) at home and about 4.3% speak an [Asian language](/wiki/Languages_of_Asia) at home.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) About 5.3% speak other languages at home.[[34]](#cite_note-34) The [Alaska Native Language Center](/wiki/Alaska_Native_Language_Center) at the [University of Alaska Fairbanks](/wiki/University_of_Alaska_Fairbanks) claims that at least 20 [Alaskan native languages](/wiki/Alaska_Native_languages) exist and there are also some languages with different dialects.[[35]](#cite_note-35)