



# Alaska Population Trends and Patterns, 1960–2018

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Demographic data are a foundation for analysis of patterns and trends in subsistence harvests of fish and wildlife resources in Alaska. The following overview focuses on selected trends in the urban and rural population of Alaska since 1960. Data are based on the results of the decennial census conducted by the US Bureau of the Census, supplemented by annual population estimates published by the Alaska Department of Labor and the American Community Survey. Census data for Alaska can be found at the Alaska Department of Labor website at <http://www.labor.state.ak.us> at the Research and Analysis page.

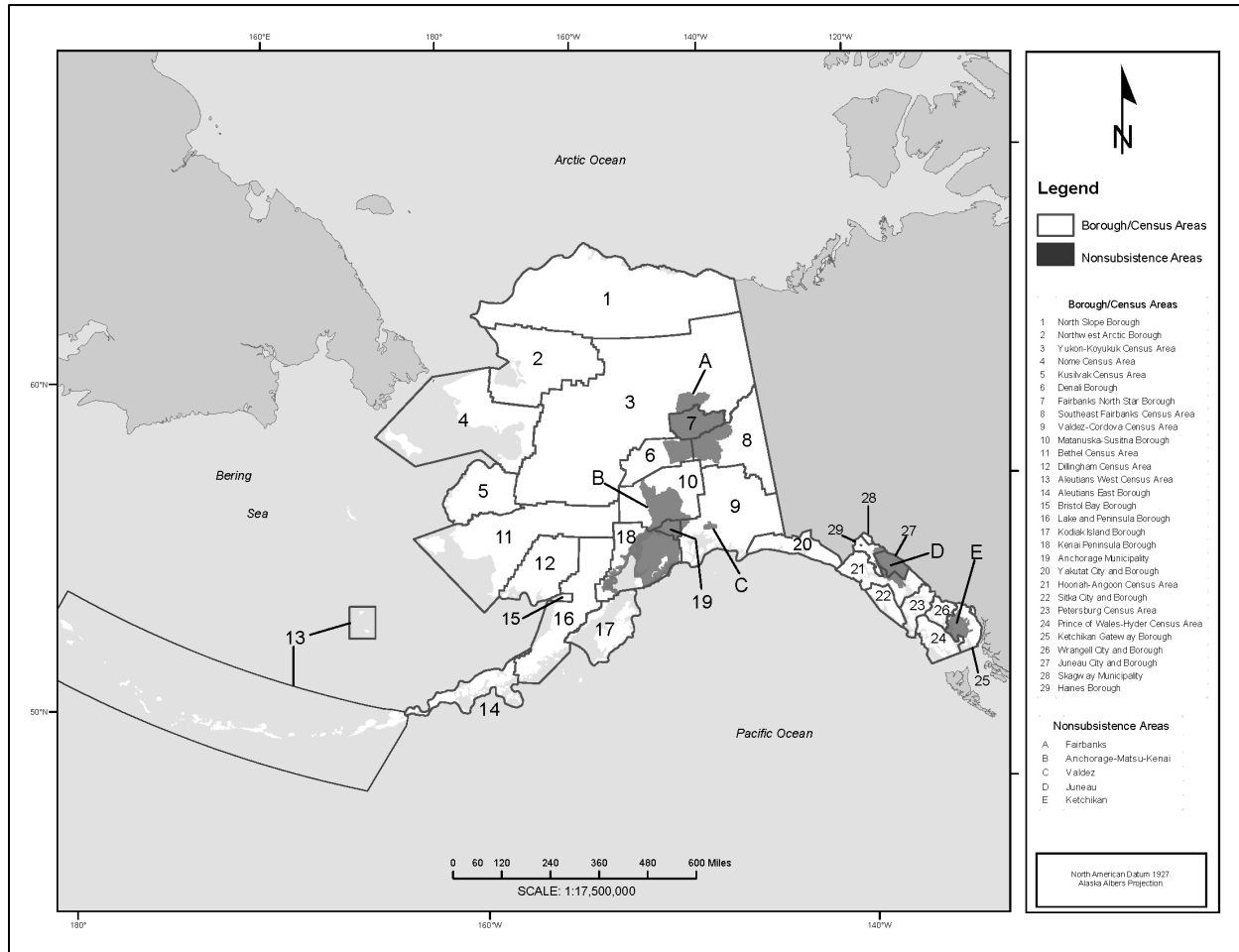
## 1. Trends in Population, 1960–2018

- As required by the 1992 state subsistence statute, the Joint Board of Fisheries and Game has identified nonsubsistence areas in Alaska. A “nonsubsistence area” is “an area or community where dependence upon subsistence [uses of fish and wildlife resources] is not a principal characteristic of the economy, culture, and way of life” (Alaska Statute [AS] 16.05.258(c)). The five nonsubsistence areas are defined in 5 AAC 99.015 and shown, along with Alaska census areas, on Map 1. The Board of Game and the Board of Fisheries may not permit subsistence hunts or fisheries in these areas, but residents of these areas may participate in authorized subsistence opportunities elsewhere in the state.
- The following analysis compares population trends in these nonsubsistence areas with those of “other Alaska areas,” as surrogates for “urban” and “rural” areas, respectively. The census designated place (CDP) of Prudhoe Bay, an industrial enclave within the North Slope Borough, is included in the nonsubsistence areas in this analysis due to its urban-industrial characteristics. All of the population of this CDP lives in group quarters, and most likely almost all have permanent residences in nonsubsistence areas.
- Table 1 reports the population of the five nonsubsistence areas plus Prudhoe Bay, and all “other Alaska areas,” from 1960 to 2018. Figure 1 depicts changes in the total population of nonsubsistence areas and other areas by decade. Figure 2 shows the percentage of Alaska’s population living in nonsubsistence areas and other areas according to the census results.
- Alaska achieved statehood in 1959. According to the results of the federal census for the following year (1960), 70.5% of the state’s total population of 226,167 lived in areas now classified as “nonsubsistence” (urban), while 29.5% lived in other Alaska areas (rural).
- Since 1960, virtually all areas of Alaska have grown in population (Table 1), but this growth has been much larger in the present nonsubsistence areas (up 284.7% from 1960 to 2018) than in other areas (84.2%). Rural areas have grown at less than 40% of the rate of the state overall (total increase in Alaska of 225.5% since 1960) (Table 1, Figure 1).

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1. This document updates an earlier overview that was prepared in November 2011, with population data through 2010, and revised in December 2017.

- Alaska passed its first subsistence law in 1978, and Congress adopted the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), with the Title VIII rural preference for subsistence,<sup>2</sup> in 1980. In 1980, 76.8% of the state’s population lived in the present nonsubsistence areas and 23.2% lived in other areas (Figure 2).



Map 1.-Map of Alaska Census Areas and State Non-Subsistence Areas

- Alaska adopted the current state subsistence statute in 1992. In 1990, the population of nonsubsistence areas was 78.7% of the state’s total, with 21.3% living in other areas.
- Since the passage of state and federal subsistence laws, there has been a steady increase in the population of nonsubsistence areas, from 308,873 in 1980 and 432,719 in 1990 to 613,312 in 2018—an increase of 98.6% since 1980 compared to 83.2% for the state overall (Table 1, Figure 1). The percentage of the state’s population living in nonsubsistence areas grew from 76.9% in 1980 and 78.7% in 1990 to 83.3% in 2018 (Figure 2).

2. See below for comparisons between population trends for state nonsubsistence areas and federal rural and nonrural areas.

- Conversely, the percentage of Alaska’s population living outside nonsubsistence areas (rural areas) decreased from 23.1% in 1980 and 21.3% in 1990 to 16.7% in 2018 (Figure 2). Since 1980, Alaska’s rural population has grown 32.2%, about one-third the rate of urban areas (Table 1).
- Since the Joint Board identified the state nonsubsistence areas in 1992, census data and estimates show that five areas or portions of areas had increased in population by 2018: Mat-Su (up 168.4%), Kenai Peninsula (up 44.3%), Anchorage Municipality (up 30.5%), Fairbanks (up 24.6%), and Juneau (up 20.5%). Ketchikan’s population was virtually unchanged, up 0.1%, and the population of Valdez decreased 4.1% (Table 1). In total, nonsubsistence areas increased in population by 41.7% from 1990 to 2018, compared to 4.8% for other areas of the state (Table 1).
- For the period 2010–2018, population growth slowed for most of the state, except the Mat-Su Borough, which grew by 18.9%. The total population of nonsubsistence areas grew by 4.1%. The population of rural areas of the state grew by 1.5% (Table 1).

Table 1.–Population of State Nonsubsistence Areas and Other Alaska Areas, 1960–2018.

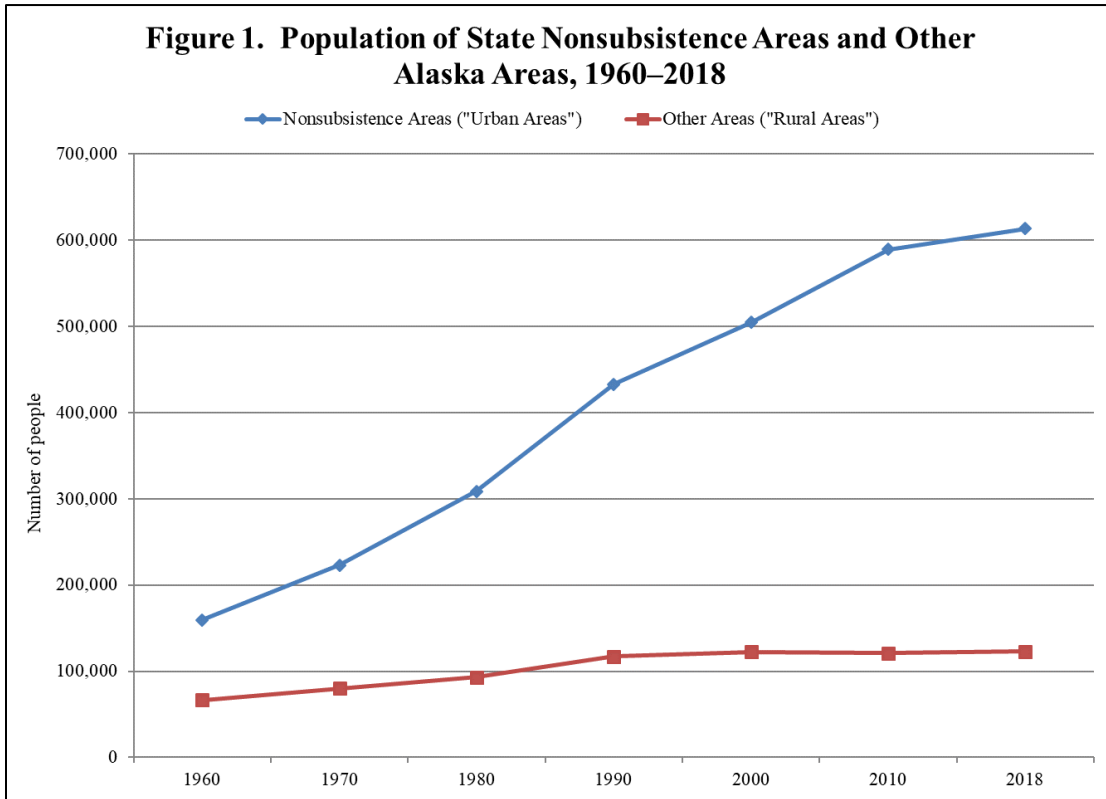
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2018	Change, 1960– 2018	Change, 1980– 2018	Change, 1990– 2018	Change, 2010 –2018
Nonsubsistence areas:											
Anchorage	96,210	148,646	216,082	305,377	367,748	434,781	458,158	376.2%	112.0%	50.0%	5.4%
Anchorage Municipality	82,833	126,385	174,431	226,338	260,283	291,826	295,365	256.6%	69.3%	30.5%	1.2%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	8,189	15,752	24,219	39,774	48,688	54,358	57,413	601.1%	137.1%	44.3%	5.6%
Mat-Su Borough	5,188	6,509	17,432	39,265	58,777	88,597	105,380	1931.2%	504.5%	168.4%	18.9%
Fairbanks	42,863	49,543	58,754	82,655	87,809	103,378	102,987	140.3%	75.3%	24.6%	-0.4%
Juneau	9,745	13,556	19,528	26,751	30,711	31,275	32,247	230.9%	65.1%	20.5%	3.1%
Ketchikan	10,070	10,041	11,316	13,828	14,059	13,477	13,843	37.5%	22.3%	0.1%	2.7%
Valdez	555	1,005	3,079	4,068	4,036	3,976	3,903	603.2%	26.8%	-4.1%	-1.8%
Prudhoe Bay	0	0	114	73	5	2,174	2,174				
ALL Nonsubsistence	159,443	222,791	308,873	432,752	504,368	589,061	613,312	284.7%	98.6%	41.7%	4.1%
Other areas	66,724	80,087	92,978	117,291	122,563	121,170	122,927	84.2%	32.2%	4.8%	1.5%
Alaska	226,167	302,878	401,851	550,043	626,931	710,231	736,239	225.5%	83.2%	33.9%	3.7%

## 2. Federal Rural and Nonrural Areas

- To implement the provisions of Title VIII of ANILCA, the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB) identifies “nonrural” areas (36 CFR Part 100.23). Residents of these areas may not participate in federal subsistence fisheries or hunts. The boundaries of these nonrural areas are similar, but not identical, to the state’s nonsubsistence areas. Primary differences are: in the Kenai Peninsula Borough, several places on the road system (Ninilchik, Cooper Landing, Hope) are classified as rural by the FSB; in the Mat-Su Borough, several areas along the road system (Willow, Talkeetna, Trapper Creek) are rural; the entire Denali Borough and the Southeast Fairbanks Census Area are outside the Fairbanks non-rural area; and Saxman is outside the Ketchikan non-rural area. The Prudhoe Bay CDP is classified as rural by the FSB, but its population is included in the

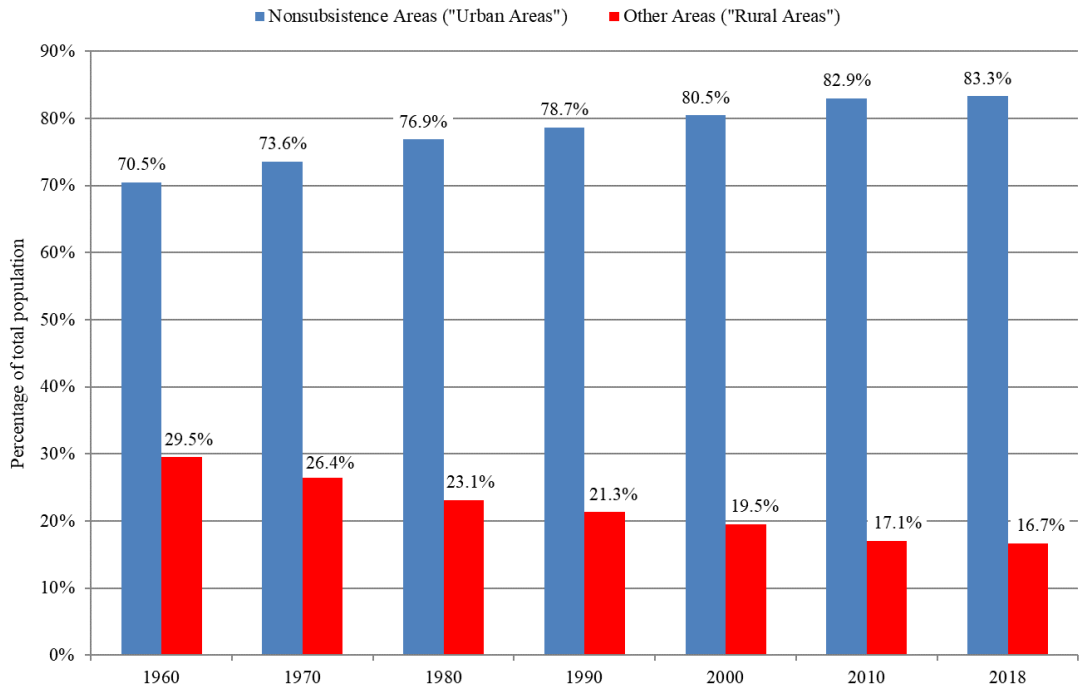
nonrural category in this analysis for the reasons stated above for its inclusion in the state nonsubsistence area population totals.<sup>3</sup>

- Figure 3 compares trends from 1980 to 2018 for state nonsubsistence and other areas and federal rural and nonrural areas. The patterns are similar. In 2018, 81.0% of Alaska’s population (596,513) lived in federal nonrural areas, and 19.0% (139,726) lived in rural areas, compared to 83.3% and 16.7%, respectively, for state nonsubsistence and other areas. In 1980, 75.1% of the state’s population (301,977) lived in present federal nonrural areas and 24.9% (99,874) lived in rural areas.

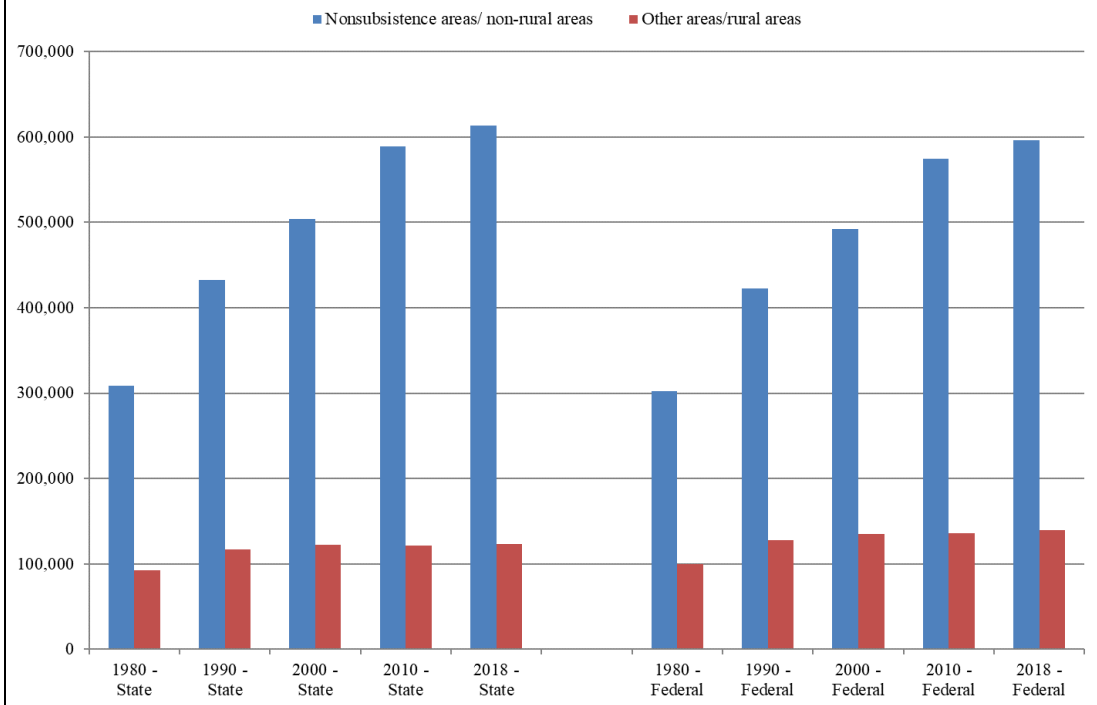


3. In 2007, a final rule published in the Federal Register (72 FR 25688) included changes to federal rural and nonrural areas, including classifying the Prudhoe Bay CDP as nonrural. However, subsequent action by the FSB, summarized in the Federal Register in November 2015 (FR 68245) revoked these changes, and Prudhoe Bay remains a rural place under federal regulations.

**Figure 2. Percentage of Alaska Population Living in State Nonsubsistence Areas and Other Alaska Areas, 1960–2018**



**Figure 3. Comparison of Population of State Nonsubsistence Areas and Other Areas with Federal Non-rural and Rural Areas, 1980–2018**

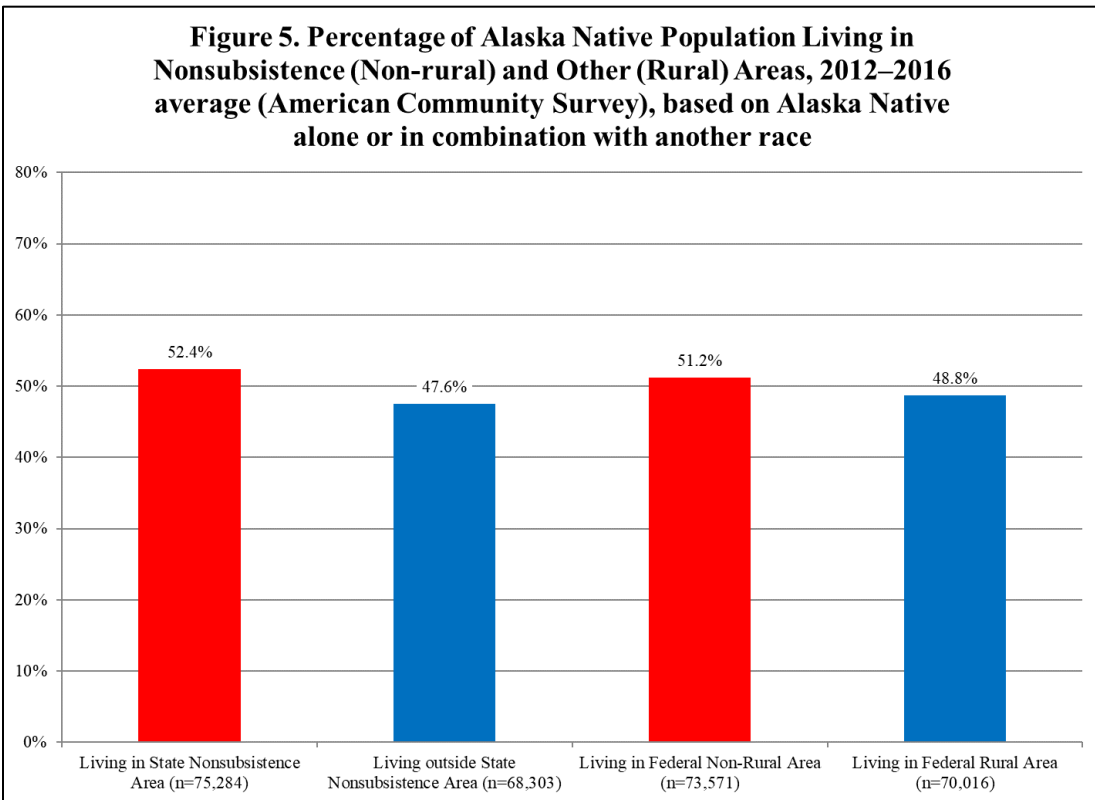
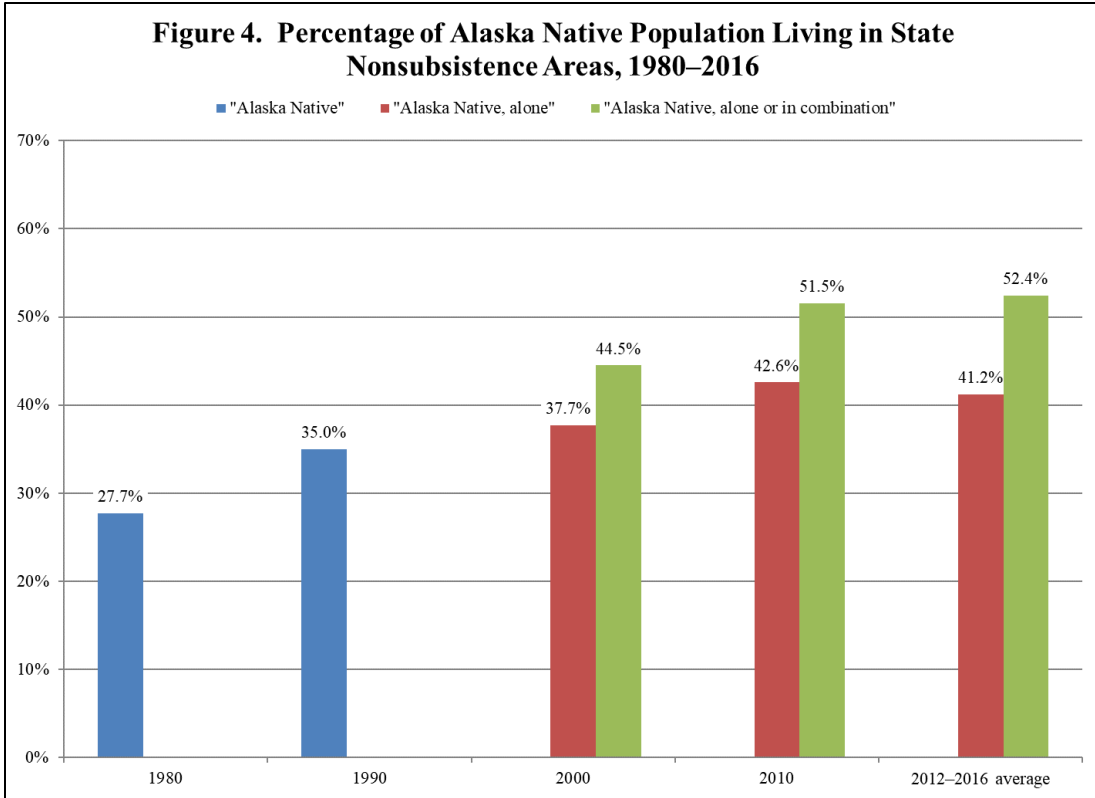


### 3. Alaska Native Population of Nonsubsistence Areas and Other Areas

- By definition, subsistence uses are customary and traditional uses. State and federal law recognize the special role that Alaska Native peoples have played in establishing and sustaining customary and traditional subsistence uses. The “findings, purpose, and intent” of Alaska’s 1992 subsistence statute notes that “customary and traditional uses of Alaska’s fish and game originated with Alaska Natives, and have been adopted and supplemented by many non-Native Alaskans as well” (ADF&G 1995:20). Section 801 of ANILCA states that “the continuation of the opportunity for subsistence uses by rural residents of Alaska, including both Natives and non-Natives, on public lands and by Alaska Natives on Native lands, is essential to Native physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence and to non-Native physical, economic, traditional, and social existence.” Therefore, tracking the size and distribution of Alaska’s Native population provides important insights into continuities and changes in fish and wildlife harvests and uses throughout the state.
- Estimates of population by ethnicity are only available from federal census sources: the decennial census and the American Community Survey. Comparisons of Alaska’s Native population over time are complicated by changes in how the US Census collects data on ethnicity (called “race” by the census). Before 2000, respondents were just asked whether or not they were Alaska Native. Since 2000, individuals can report that they are not Alaska Native, are Alaska Native not in combination with another ethnicity (“Alaska Native alone”), or Alaska Native in combination with one or more other ethnicity. Despite these methodological changes, census data show a clear trend towards a larger percentage of the Alaska Native population living in nonsubsistence (urban) areas.<sup>4</sup>
- In 1980 (at the passage of ANILCA and two years after the passage of the state’s first subsistence law), just 27.7% of Alaska’s Native population lived in nonsubsistence (urban) areas; this increased to 35.0% in 1990 (Figure 4).
- In 2000, about 37.7% of census respondents who reported that they were Alaska Native in combination with no other ethnicity lived in nonsubsistence areas; however, this urban portion rose to 44.5% of census respondents who reported they were Alaska Native alone or in combination with another ethnicity (Figure 4).
- In 2010, the majority (51.5%) of the state’s Alaska Native population—those who reported that they were Alaska Native alone or in combination with one or more other ethnicity—lived in nonsubsistence areas, and 48.5% lived in other Alaska (rural) areas. Of those who reported that they were Alaska Native alone, 42.6% lived in nonsubsistence areas. The American Community Survey documented a similar pattern for the period 2012–2016: 52.4% of respondents who were Alaska Native alone or in combination with another ethnicity lived in nonsubsistence areas, as did 41.2% of those who were Alaska Native alone.

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4. Census data for the Alaska Native population by place of residence were derived from Bureau of the Census 1984 for 1980; Alaska Department of Labor 1991 for 1990; and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section webpage for 2000 and subsequent years <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/index.cfm>



- Patterns are similar for federal nonrural and rural areas. For the period 2012–2016, 51.2% of American Community Survey respondents who reported they were Alaska Native alone or in combination with another ethnicity lived in federal nonrural areas, compared to 52.4% of this group that lived in state nonsubsistence areas (Figure 5).
- As shown in Table 2, 12.3% of the population of the state nonsubsistence areas in 2012–2016 was Alaska Native, as was 10.5% of the nonsubsistence area population in 2000 and 12.1% in 2010. In 2000, 2010, and 2012–2016, Alaska Natives were the majority of the population in other areas, at 54.0%, 55.3%, and 55.3%, respectively. Alaska Natives made up 19.0% of the state’s total population in 2000, 19.5% in 2010, and 19.5% in 2012–2016.

Table 2.–Percentage of the Population of State Nonsubsistence Areas and Other Areas that is Alaska Native, 2000, 2010, and 2012–2016.

Year	Nonsubsistence (Urban) Areas			Other (Rural) Areas		
	Total	Alaska Native	% Alaska Native	Total	Alaska Native	% Alaska Native
2000	504,368	53,060	10.5%	122,563	66,181	54.0%
2010	589,061	71,288	12.1%	121,170	67,024	55.3%
2012–2016	613,340	75,284	12.3%	123,515	68,303	55.3%

*Note:* Alaska Native defined as those reporting that they are Alaska Native alone or Alaska Native in combination with one or more other ethnicity. 2012–2016 is annual average over the five-year period.

#### 4. The Distribution of Population in Nonsubsistence Areas and Other Areas, 2018

- Table 3 shows the distribution of Alaska’s urban (living in nonsubsistence areas as defined by the Joint Board plus the industrial enclave of Prudhoe Bay) and rural (living outside nonsubsistence areas) population in 2018 by census areas or subareas and by the seven regions that were first used to summarize harvests of fish, wildlife, and wild plants for home use in Wolfe and Walker 1987 and most recently in Fall 2018 (see also Fall 2016).
- 100% of the population of three regions was rural in 2018: Kodiak Island Borough, Southwest, and Western, as was 92.2% of the Arctic region (Table 4)
- A large majority of the population of the other three regions was urban: Southcentral, 98.5%; Interior, 91.6%; and Southeast, 63.2% (Table 4).
- In 2018, the largest rural population lived in the Southeast region, 26,786 (21.8% of the state’s total rural population), followed by Arctic (25,530; 20.8%), Western (25,024; 20.4%), Southwest (15,852; 12.9%), Kodiak Island Borough (13,136; 10.7%), Interior (9,428; 7.7%), and Southcentral (7,171; 5.8%) (Table 5, Figure 6).



Table 3.—Alaska Urban and Rural Population 2018 by Region and Subregion.

	Urban	Rural	Total
<b>Arctic Region</b>	<b>2,174</b>	<b>25,530</b>	<b>27,704</b>
Nome Census Area	0	9,988	9,988
North Slope Borough	2,174	7,751	9,925
Northwest Arctic Borough	0	7,791	7,791
<b>Interior Region</b>	<b>102,987</b>	<b>9,428</b>	<b>112,415</b>
Aniak Census Subarea	0	1,403	1,403
Denali Borough (portion)	1,354	269	1,623
Fairbanks Northstar Borough	97,121	0	97,121
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	4,512	2,464	6,976
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	0	5,292	5,292
<b>Kodiak Island Borough</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13,136</b>	<b>13,136</b>
<b>Southcentral Region</b>	<b>462,061</b>	<b>7,171</b>	<b>469,232</b>
Anchorage Municipality	295,365	0	295,365
Denali Borough (portion)	0	202	202
Kenai Peninsula Borough	57,413	1,058	58,471
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	105,380	363	105,743
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	3,903	5,548	9,451
<b>Southeast Region</b>	<b>46,090</b>	<b>26,786</b>	<b>72,876</b>
Haines Borough	0	2,480	2,480
Hoonah-Angood Census Area	0	2,168	2,168
Juneau City and Borough	32,247	0	32,247
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	13,843	0	13,843
Petersburg Borough	0	3,198	3,198
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	0	6,251	6,251
Sitka City and Borough	0	8,652	8,652
Skagway Municipality	0	1,088	1,088
Wrangell City and Borough	0	2,426	2,426
Yakutat Borough	0	523	523
<b>Southwest Region</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15,852</b>	<b>15,852</b>
Aleutians East Borough	0	2,959	2,959
Aleutians West Census Area	0	5,330	5,330
Bristol Bay Borough	0	879	879
Dillingham Census Area	0	5,021	5,021
Lake and Peninsula Borough	0	1,663	1,663
<b>Western Region</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>25,024</b>	<b>25,024</b>
Kusilvak Census Area	0	8,333	8,333
Lower Kuskokwim Census Subarea	0	16,691	16,691
<b>State of Alaska Totals</b>	<b>613,312</b>	<b>122,927</b>	<b>736,239</b>

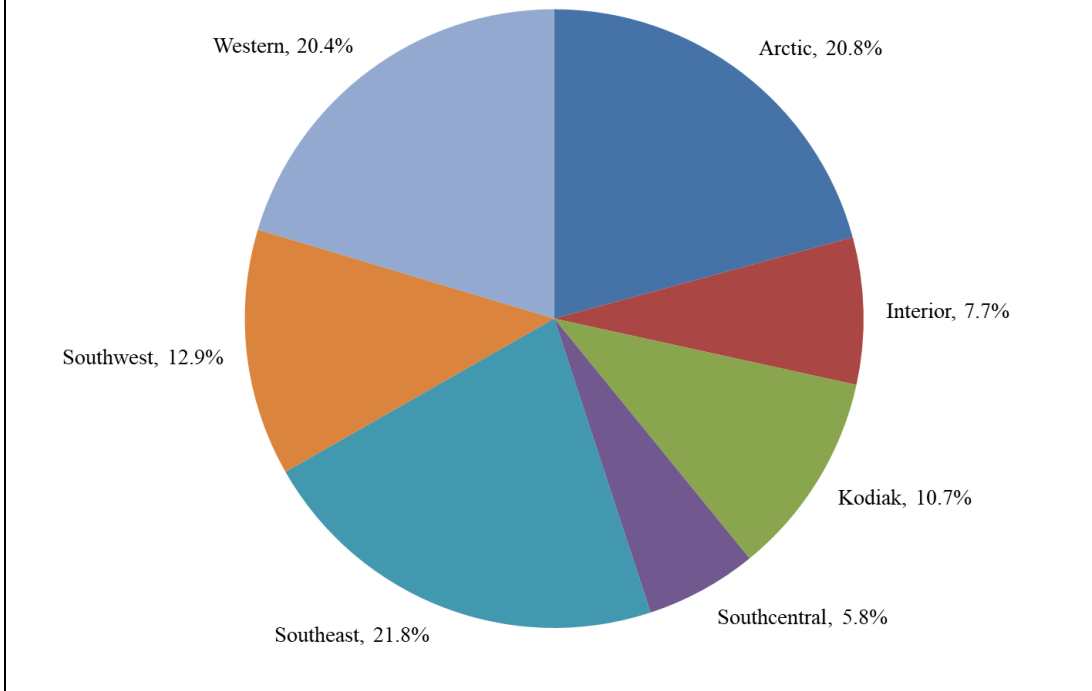
Table 4.—Percent of 2018 Population of Alaska Regions.

	Urban	Rural	Total
Arctic	7.8%	92.2%	100.0%
Interior	91.6%	8.4%	100.0%
Kodiak	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Southcentral	98.5%	1.5%	100.0%
Southeast	63.2%	36.8%	100.0%
Southwest	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Western	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
State	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%

Table 5.—Percent of Alaska Urban, Rural, and Total 2018 Population by Region.

	Urban	Rural	Total
Arctic	0.4%	20.8%	3.8%
Interior	16.8%	7.7%	15.3%
Kodiak	0.0%	10.7%	1.8%
Southcentral	75.3%	5.8%	63.7%
Southeast	7.5%	21.8%	9.9%
Southwest	0.0%	12.9%	2.2%
Western	0.0%	20.4%	3.4%
State	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Figure 6. Percentage of Alaska Rural Population by Region, 2018**



## 5. Some Key Findings

- Alaska’s population has grown substantially since 1960 (226%), but growth has been much greater in those portions of the state now classified as nonsubsistence areas (urban areas) (285%) by the Alaska Joint Board than other areas (rural) (84%).
- Since 1990, there has been little growth in Alaska’s rural population (+5%) while the urban population grew by 42%.
- Population trends for areas of the state classified as nonrural and rural by the Federal Subsistence Board match those of the Joint Board’s nonsubsistence and other areas.
- Since 1980, the portion of Alaska’s Native population living in nonsubsistence (urban) areas has increased. For the period 2012–2016, 52% of the respondents to the American Community Survey who classified themselves as Alaska Native alone or in combination with another ethnicity lived in state nonsubsistence areas; 51% lived in federal nonrural areas.
- About 55% of the population of Alaska’s rural areas (outside state nonsubsistence areas) was Alaska Native (alone or in combination with another ethnicity) in 2012–2016, as was 12% of the population of nonsubsistence (urban) areas and 19% of the population of the state overall.
- In 2018, the largest portion of the state’s rural population (living outside state nonsubsistence areas) lived in Southeast Alaska (22%), followed by Arctic (21%), Western (20%), Southwest (13%), Kodiak Island Borough (11%), Interior (8%), and Southcentral (6%).

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