

STATEWIDE IN ALASKA

Highlights: The U. S. Bureau of Census recently released 1968 preliminary population estimates listing Alaska in fourth place in terms of civilian population growth since the 1960 census. Nevada, with a 57.9 percent growth greatly exceeded any of the other top four states all of whom had growth in excess of 24 percent. The Census Bureau estimated that Alaska's civilian population would approach 250,000 in 1968. (The Alaska Department of Labor estimated the total civilian population at 252,000 in 1968.)

Figures recently released by the U. S. Department of Commerce showed Alaskan exports exceeded imports by \$31.6 million in 1968. Wood products exported to Japan accounted for over 70 percent of total exports. With the addition of liquified natural gas, ammonia, and urea exports starting in 1969, the ratio of exports to imports will again increase sharply.

Canned shrimp production in Alaska more than doubled from 1967 to 1968 with the state producing 84 percent of the total Pacific Coast pack. SOUTHEAST Alaska's pack remained virtually the same as in 1967. CENTRAL and WESTWARD areas were responsible for the dramatic production increase.

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game reports that total 1968 income to Alaskan fishermen increased by 58 percent over 1967. A 465 million pound catch had a value to the fishermen of \$75.3 million. The 1967 catch was 345 million pounds with a value to the fishermen of \$47.7 million.

The Kuskokwim Fishermen Cooperative, Inc. was the recipient of a grant and loan totaling \$570,000 from the Economic Development Administration for building a floating fisheries plant capable of processing, freezing, and storing salmon and other fish. The facility is expected to be ready for the 1970 season. To take care of the 1969 catch in the KUSKOKWIM RIVER area, an agreement has been reached between the Cooperative and a Japanese fish buyer. Processing will be done entirely by Alaskans, according to the agreement. Japanese nationals will serve only as technicians to instruct and supervise the operation.

Encouraging to Alaska coal mine operators was the news that Japanese demand for coal is rapidly rising and should continue the sharp upward trend begun in 1968. It is believed the coal demand will eventually have an alleviating effect on the current depressed condition of Alaska coal production. A coal field of undetermined size near CORDOVA has been found to yield coal with an unusually low ash content, which makes it especially desirable for use in steel-producing blast furnaces. Feasibility surveys are currently being made for a Japanese firm to determine the extent of the beds.

Excavation is scheduled to begin soon on a copper prospect near DENALI. Preliminary plans call for a 750 foot exploration tunnel to be dug. It is estimated that 20 men will be needed for the tunnel project which is scheduled for completion in late summer.

State Rural Development grants were made recently to the following villages: ANVIK, \$2,192 for painting a bridge and building a 600 foot log cribbing along the YUKON riverbank to control erosion; OLD HARBOR, \$6,000 for a water reservoir; WHITE MOUNTAIN, \$4,384 for renovating two buildings located on village owned property, one to be used as a store and the other for community functions; BREVIG MISSION, \$8,728 for a community building. An estimated 100 persons will be employed from the villages as a result of the grants. The Office of Economic Opportunity has approved a grant of \$50,015 to METLAKATLA. The money is to be used for summer and industrial development projects. The main purpose of the grant is to develop a year-round industry which will provide employment opportunities for residents of the community. A community center at BETHEL has been assured by a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. About 75 percent of the estimated cost will be covered by the grant of \$199,937.

Employment: Total estimated employment began its seasonal upturn in March as the effects of an unusually severe winter lessened. Manufacturing employment increased by 700 over-the-month mainly influenced by partial resumption of logging operations in Southeast Alaska. The transportation industries reported a modest gain over February with most of the improvement resulting from increased trucking & air transportation activity in the Fairbanks area. Eating & drinking places increased their employment slightly from month-to-month with over half of the increase occurring in the city of Fairbanks. Federal & state governments each reported a slight employment decline from last month. The state government decline was attributable to fewer available jobs for part-time workers. The remaining industries reported little or no change from the previous month.

Over-the-year total estimated employment increased by 2,600. State & local government employment increases exercised the most influence on the net gain. The increases were spread through the school systems, city & borough governments and several state departments. Each sector of retail trade showed the results of new businesses and business expansion in most regions over March 1968. The trucking & air transportation sectors reported firm employment increases over last year. Most of the increases are directly related to accelerated oil activity on the North Slope. Year-to-year employment declines were paced by fewer large construction projects and by effects of the sharp reduction of timber operations last fall. Little yearly change was noted in the remaining industries.

Unemployment: Total estimated unemployment declined by 1,500 persons from February-to-March. The unemployment rate declined from 12.5 to 10.9 percent during the period. All industry groups registered unemployment declines as improved weather conditions provided some stimulus.

Over-the-year total estimated unemployment remained above last year's levels for the second consecutive month. The unemployment rate improved slightly from 11.2 to 10.9 percent this March. Influences from the fish cannery segment and the logging segment of manufacturing have exercised the most pressure to raise unemployment above March 1968 levels.