

Aleutians West Census Area

An area with a turbulent past, flourishing modern ports

The Aleutian Islands arose from the active volcanic arc that divides the Bering Sea and the Pacific Ocean basin, spanning 1,200 miles from the western Alaska mainland to eastern Russia. The Aleutians West Census Area also includes the Pribilof Islands — four isolated basalt outcrops jutting out of the Bering Sea Shelf more than 300 miles north of the town of Nikolski.

A complex history of militarization and hardships combined with a traditional subsistence fishing culture have shaped the Aleutians West Census Area into what it is today — a sparsely populated but culturally diverse area largely dependent on fishing.

Inhabited places now include Nikolski, St. George, St. Paul, Adak, Atka, and Dutch Harbor-Unalaska — the population center and home to most of the area's industrial jobs. (See Exhibit 1.) The other small communities mainly rely on subsistence.



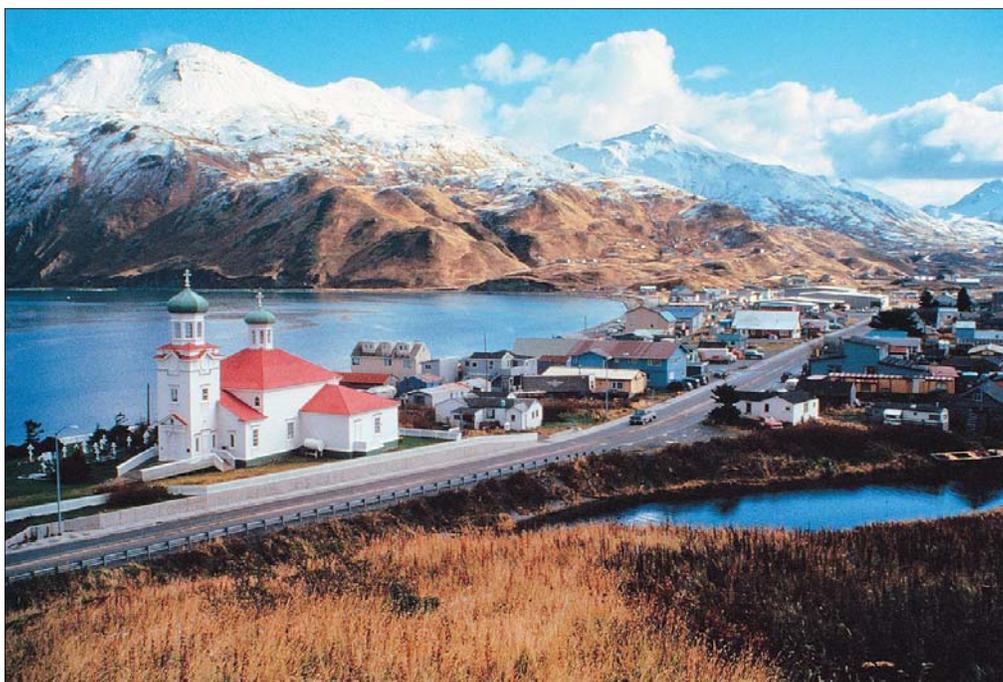
At left is a bomb shelter tunnel on Kiska Island, a remnant of Japanese military occupation during World War II. The entrance, as seen from the inside, has been partially blocked by dirt and debris. Kiska Island is nearly 1,300 miles from Anchorage. Photo by Buzz Hoffman

Attu Island was populated with Coast Guard personnel stationed at the LORAN outpost until 2010, when the tower was decommissioned.

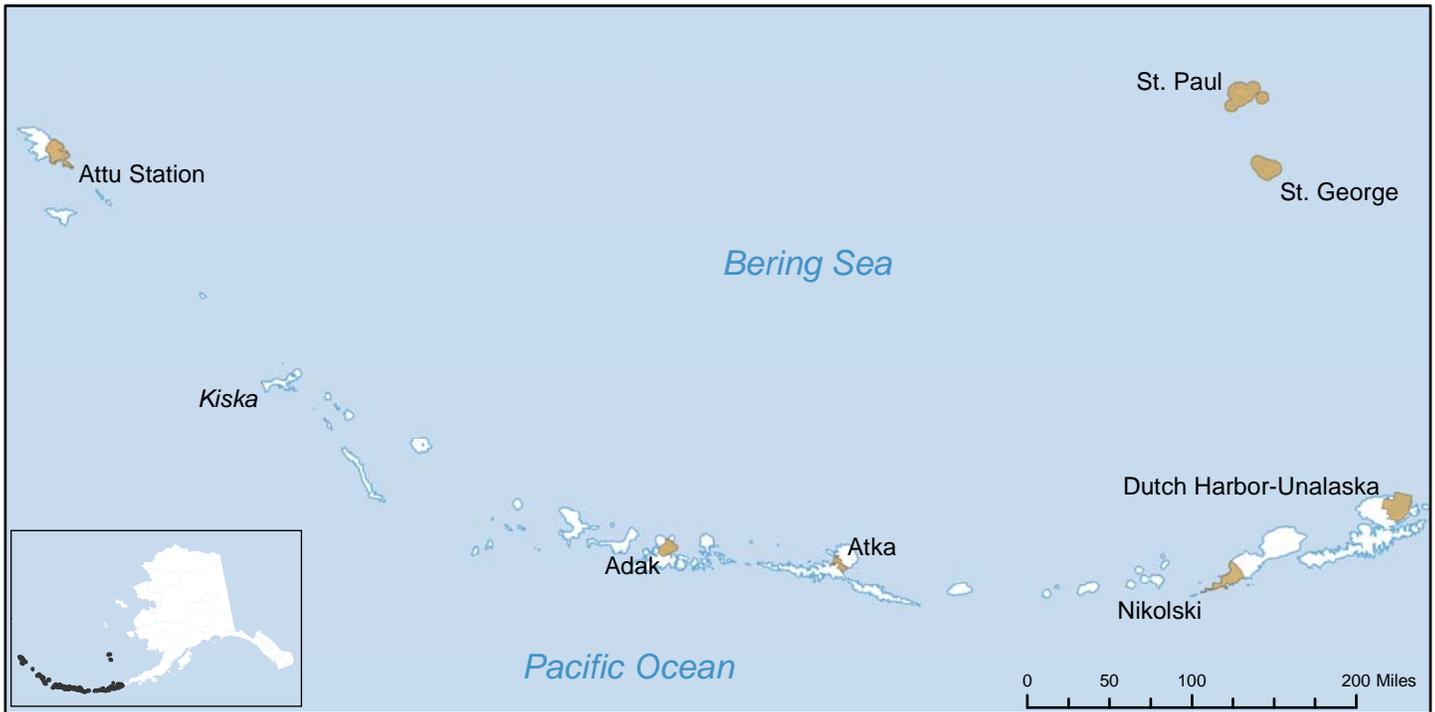
The original population

The Alaska Natives of the region are Unangan, later given the name “Aleut” by Russian explorers. Early estimates for the Native population were in the thousands when the Danish explorer Vitus Bering arrived in 1741, but the subsequent arrival of the Russian fur trade and subjugation of the Aleuts greatly reduced the population through famine, disease, war, and enslavement.

Nearly two centuries later, in June of 1942, the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor and the invasions of Attu and Kiska left the area a war zone. According to National Park Service estimates, 800 Aleuts were captured and another 840 interned



Above, downtown Unalaska is seen from the air. Photo by Wanetta Ayers



to Southeast Alaska by the U.S. government. By 2011, the area was home to fewer than 1,000 Alaska Natives.

Military aftershocks

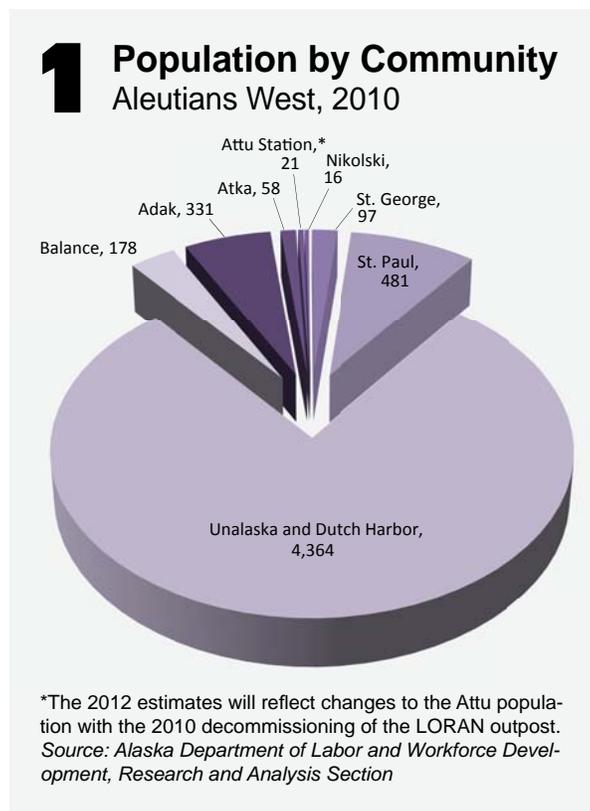
After World War II ended, the military maintained its naval and radar presence throughout the Cold War. The last military installation was closed during an iteration of National Base Realignment and Closure, and the last troops left a now-abandoned Adak Naval Station in 1997.

The removal of roughly 5,000 troops heavily impacted the population and employment trends, as seen in exhibits 2 and 3. Though both declined dramatically, they have since stabilized and the focus has shifted to the area’s other industries.

Although the region used to have much lower unemployment than the rest of the state, since the military’s departure its unemployment has tracked just a few points lower than the statewide average.

A diverse area

The area’s demographics make it an outlier in nearly every category in comparison to the rest of the state. The population is highly multicultural, with high numbers of minorities. (See Exhibit 4.) Aleutians West is also nearly two-thirds male, the

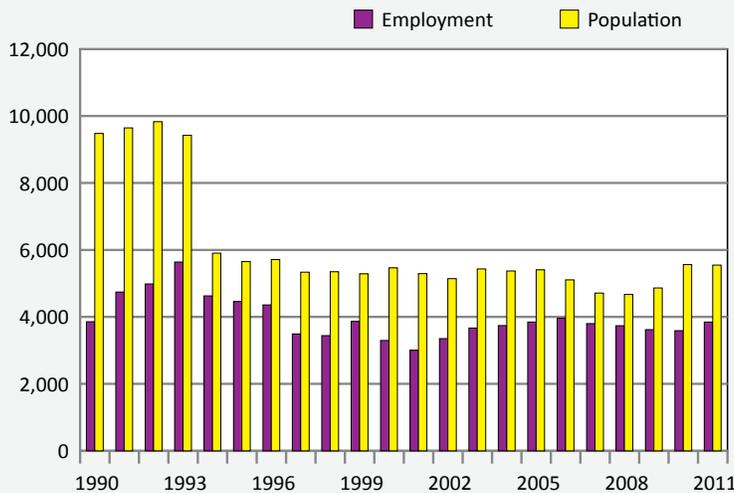


highest proportion in Alaska, and its workforce is also predominantly men.

Of the current census area population of 5,546, more than 2,500 live in group quarters rather than homes, a hallmark of the manufacturing industry.

2 Population and Employment

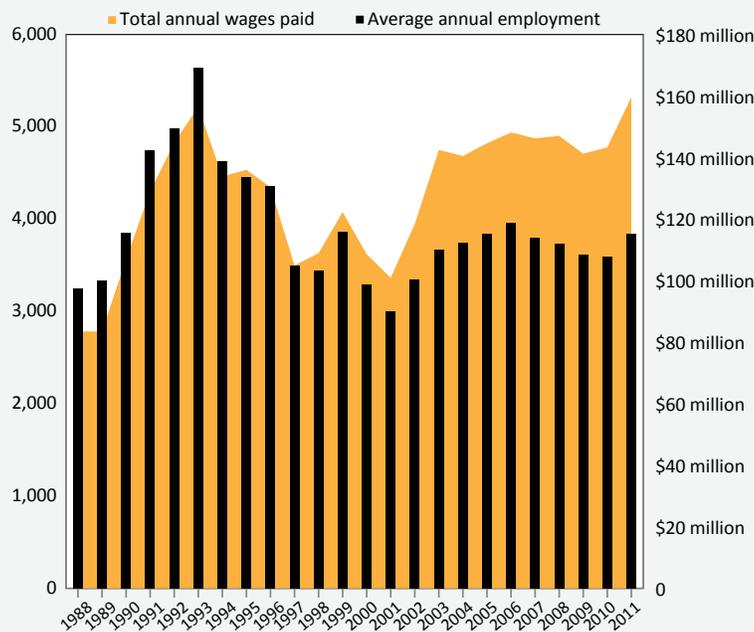
Aleutians West Census Area, 1990 to 2011



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

3 Employment and Wages

Aleutians West Census Area, 1988 to 2011



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

Most jobs are in fisheries

The crab and groundfish¹ Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands fisheries — or BSAI — that use Dutch Harbor as a processing port are unlike the coastal salmon fisheries in other Alaska regions, because they take place far offshore in federal waters and span both summer and winter.

Bering Sea pollock, the largest Alaska harvest in volume and value, has one season that begins in January and a longer one that starts in June. Opilio and tanner crab are harvested in the winter starting in October until the quota is reached. Cod, rockfish, sablefish, sole, and other groundfish are harvested throughout the year, depending on catch limits.

The BSAI fisheries provide year-round opportunities for vessels of all size classes, and keep processors in Dutch Harbor at work throughout the year. Last year for the 15th year in a row, Dutch Harbor was the top ranking seafood port in the nation for pounds of fish harvested. (See Exhibit 5.)

The area's crab and groundfish harvest volume dwarfs the neighboring salmon fisheries, and they have created a small world dedicated to the harvesting, packaging, and delivery of seafood from the ocean floor to dealers all over the globe. Cod and pollock fisheries began to flourish in the 1980s following a crash in shellfish stocks, such as opilio crab, which have since rebounded.

Jobs outside seafood

Of the Aleutians West's 3,844 total jobs in 2011, only 1,550 were outside of manufacturing — that is, outside seafood processing. Among the other industries, 310 jobs were in transportation and warehousing, 187 were in retail, and 122 were in health care.

Similar to many rural fishing communities, however, most jobs are connected to fishing in one way or another. In Unalaska, the large processing company Unisea owns not only the manufacturing plant, but also the hotels and worker housing.

Seasonality means a few highs and lows for these jobs, but the overlap of harvest times and the support services required to host large-scale produc-

¹Groundfish includes all fisheries except salmon, herring, halibut, crustaceans, and dive fisheries.



Above, Dutch Harbor is seen from the top of Bunker Hill. Mount Ballyhoo is in the background, and one of the community's seafood plants is in the front. Photo by Scot Loehrer

tion create a flat underlying trend of year-round jobs. (See Exhibit 6.)

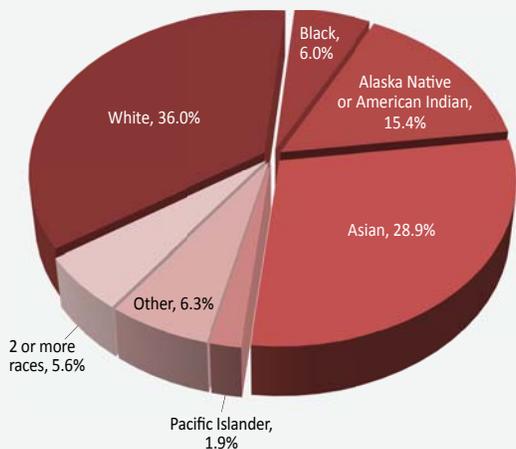
Aleutians West has the lowest government employment of all boroughs and census areas in Alaska. Government jobs account for less than 15 percent of total employment compared to about 25 percent statewide. Local government, combined with municipal and tribal agencies, had the largest government presence at 487 jobs in 2011. Three

school districts served more than 500 students during that school year.

Residents are often processors

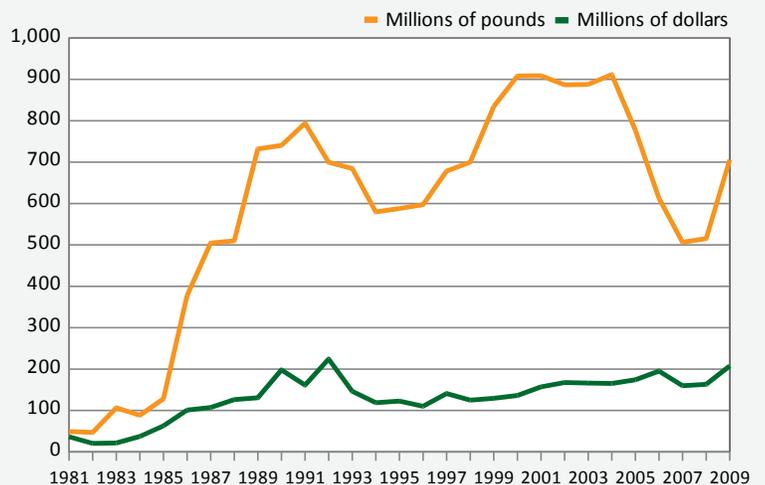
It's a common perception that seafood jobs tend to be filled by migrant and transient workers, and this is true — nearly 75 percent of seafood processing workers in Alaska were nonresidents in 2010. However, in Aleutians West, these jobs are viable

Multicultural Census Area 4 Aleutians West, 2010



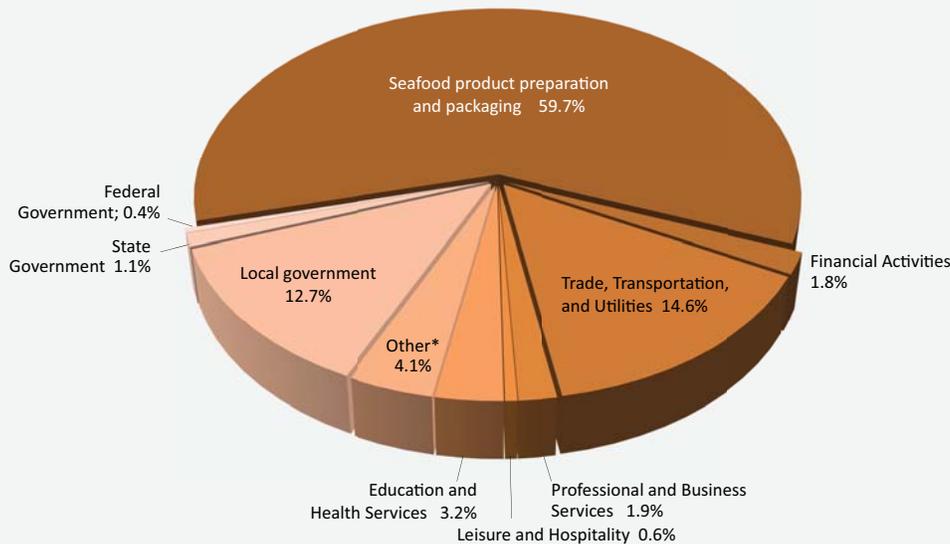
Note: Hispanics, who can be of any race, made up 14 percent.
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

5 The Nation's Busiest Port Dutch Harbor-Unalaska, 1981 to 2009



Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

6 Employment by Industry Aleutians West Census Area, 2011



*Includes other nonseafood manufacturing, construction, information, and other services
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

for locals because of the fisheries making year-round deliveries and the sheer volume processed. In 2010, 34 percent of seafood processing workers in Aleutians West were Alaska residents, and of those, 30 percent lived in the census area. This put Aleutians West in the middle of the pack for residency among Alaska's large seafood processing ports.

More than 800 Aleutians West residents worked in the manufacturing industry in 2011, and food processing has consistently been the top occupation among locals. (See Exhibit 7.)

A checkpoint in the race to the Arctic

Although fishing remains the chain's primary industrial activity, the area's location puts it at the forefront of emerging possibilities for arctic commerce.

The Aleutian chain forms part of the southern boundary of the Arctic Ocean and the Bering, Beaufort, and Chukchi seas. The retreating sea ice in the Arctic Ocean has prompted much discussion about whether it would provide a less expensive shipping lane for ocean-going freightliners. The area is also under exploration as a potential source for offshore oil drilling.

Adak's underused military facilities and Dutch Harbor's existing port capability — in conjunction with the islands' proximity to existing shipping lanes and the waters being explored — make these communities possible future staging and transfer areas.

7 Top Jobs for Residents Aleutians West Census Area, 2011

Occupation	Number of workers	Female	Male	Age 45 and over
Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers	464	142	322	277
Material Moving Workers, All Other	143	15	128	85
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers, All Other	60	1	59	34
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	56	5	51	16
Office Clerks, General	50	37	13	24
Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	47	7	40	19
Helpers: Installation, Maintenance, Repair Workers	38	4	34	15
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	34	24	10	24
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids/Housekeeping Cleaners	32	13	19	21
Cashiers	31	30	1	9
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	31	1	30	15
Construction Laborers	31	5	26	8
General and Operations Managers	30	10	20	21
Executive Secretaries and Executive Admin Assistants	28	27	1	9
Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equip Operators	27	2	25	12
Sales and Related Workers, All Other	25	19	6	7
Billing and Posting Clerks	24	19	5	11
Teachers and Instructors, All Other	22	17	5	10
Cooks, Institution and Cafeteria	21	9	12	14
Office and Administrative Support Workers, All Other	21	18	3	6
Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators	21	1	20	11
Security Guards	17	6	11	8
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	17	8	9	8
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	16	2	14	6
Food Preparation Workers	15	9	6	12

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