

# Elim

## People and Place

### Location

Elim is located on the northwest shore of Norton Bay on the Seward Peninsula, 96 miles east of Nome. It lies 460 miles northwest of Anchorage. The area encompasses 2.4 square miles of land and no water area. Norton Sound is ice-free generally between mid-June and mid-November.

### Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Elim had 313 inhabitants. The entire community lived in households, 20% of all housing units were vacant, and there were no group quarters. About 94.2% of the population was fully, or in part, Alaska Native or American Indian. Approximately 5.1% were white and 2.2% were of two or more races. The gender composition presented an acute imbalance: 43.1% females and 56.9% males.

Similar to many other rural communities, Elim was a young village. Its median age (23.6 years old) was significantly younger than the national median (35.3 years in 2000): 44.7% of the population was 19 years old and under and only 9.9% was 55 years and over. A total of 7.5% of the population of Elim age 25 and over had a bachelor's degree or higher, 77.4% had graduated from high school or gone on to further schooling, and 22.6% never passed high school.

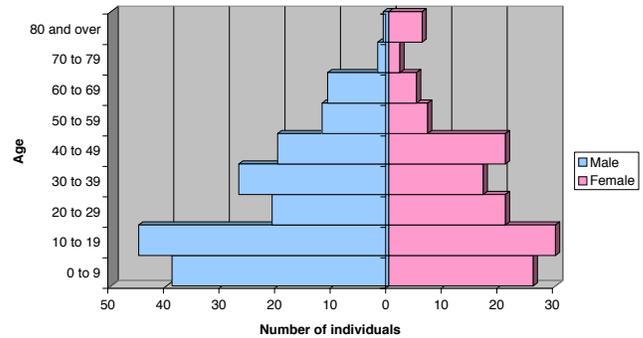
### History

Elim was once a Malemiut Inupiat Eskimo village, known as Nuviakchak. Inupiak groups occupied all this area and managed the territory through hunting and gathering practices. In 1911 part of this territory was declared federal reindeer reserve.

Three years later, in 1914, the foundation of the Elim Mission Roadhouse, including a mission and convent, represented another fundamental moment of Elim's modern history. The City was incorporated in 1970. A year later, the community of Elim chose not to participate in the political process around the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and instead opted for title to the 298,000 acres of land in the former Elim Reserve. Subsistence practices remains significant to the economy, diet, and lifestyle of the community. The sale or importation of alcohol is banned in the village.

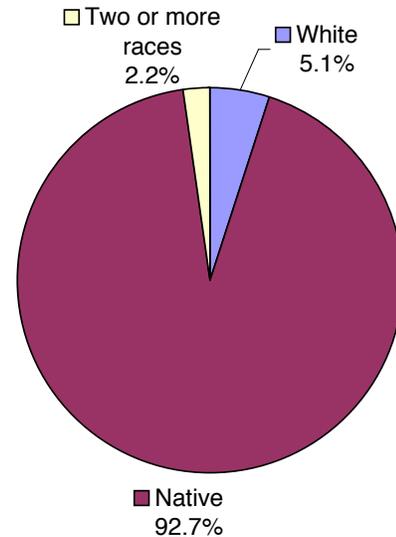
**2000 Population Structure  
Elim**

Data source: US Census



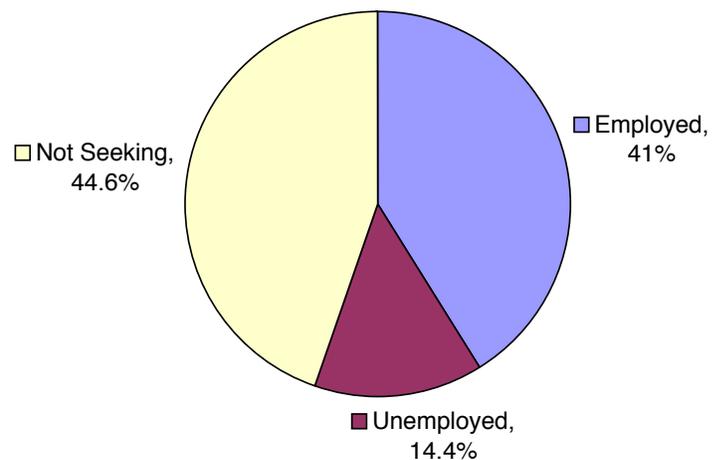
**2000 Racial Structure  
Elim**

Data source: US Census



**2000 Employment Structure  
Elim**

Data source: US Census



## Infrastructure

### Current Economy

Elim is a small town which has a relatively insular economy. Subsistence harvesting is still a very important part of the local economy, and is fundamental to many households. As a vast majority of the community is Alaska Native (Endangered Species Act restrictions do not apply), seal, walrus, beluga whale, reindeer, moose, fish and home gardens are main elements of inhabitants' diet.

Cash employment is related to two main factors: fishing (39 commercial fishing permit holders) and government employment (28.4% of the potential workforce). Elim's fishing fleet has two delivery alternatives, either landing their catch in Unalakleet or Nome - places with processing plants - or selling their catch at the buying station owned by the Norton Sound Seafood Products company in town.

The employment structure showed that 41% of the total workforce was employed, a very high 14.4% was unemployed, and 44.6% of the potential workforce was not seeking a job. In 2000, 7.9% of the population lived below the line of poverty. The community showed a per capita income of \$10,300 and a median household income of \$40,179.

### Governance

The second-class city of Elim, incorporated in 1970, has a "strong mayor" form of government with a six-member council. The city, located in an unorganized area, collects a 2% sales tax. Elim Native Corporation is the local Native corporation. The regional Native corporation, a for-profit organization with its headquarters in Nome, is the Bering Straits Native Corporation, which operates a series of businesses including the Bering Straits Development Company and the non-profit Bering Strait Foundation. Its counterpart in the area, the regional Native non-profit institution, is the Kawerak, Inc. The CDQ, located in Anchorage, is the Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDC). NSEDC operates the Norton Sound Seafood Products facility. Also located in the community is the Native Village of Elim, recognized as a traditional council by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Elim did not participate in ANCSA, though they have full title to approximately 300,000 acres of former reservation lands.

The area is also served by the Bering Straits

Housing Authority, the Norton Sound Health Corporation (regional health corporation serving the Bering Strait villages) and the Eskimo Walrus Commission (regional non-profit organization serving 19 communities in the western coast).

Nome and Unalakleet have the closest Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) offices. In order to access to a Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) office, Elim inhabitants must to go Nome. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has its closest quarters in Anchorage.

### Facilities

The community is accessible by air and sea. It has a good and recently modernized state-owned 3,000 foot gravel runway. The local Native corporation owns a private 4,700 foot paved airstrip with a 1,390 foot crosswind runway at Moses Point. The approximate price of a roundtrip ticket by plane from the community to Anchorage, with a connection in Nome, in early September of 2003 was approximately \$560. Elim's airport is served by Hagland Air, Baker Aviation, Cape Smith Air Service, Olson Air, and Artic Transportation Service. Elim does not have its own dock. Supplies are brought and lightered to shore from Nome. There are plans to develop a dock which could significantly change the economic structure of the village. A cargo ship brings freight annually to Nome.

The local school, the Anguiin, has 196 students and 9 teachers. There is also a city owned health service, Elim Health Clinic, police, and state Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO). The city owns the AVEC which provides diesel fuel-generated power as well as subsidized power. Water is derived from a well, and sewage services are provided by centralized systems built in 1974. This early infrastructure included indoor water heaters and plumbing, and in-home washers and dryers.

## Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

### Commercial Fishing

Elim, with its relatively small size, is deeply engaged in all sort of fishing activities. On the commercial side, Elim had 48 commercial fishing permits, only 26 of which were fished. There were a total of 39 permit holders resident in the community.

There were also 28 residents registered as crewmen. The lack of a dock probably limited the operations of the part of the community involved in fishing. Current plans to build one can significantly change this situation. Permits held by community-members pertained to three species: herring, salmon, and crab.

*Herring:* There were 11 permits to catch herring roe with pot gear in vessels under 60 feet. All of them were issued to fish in the Norton Sound, although only 10 of these permits were fished.

*Salmon:* Salmon permits constitute the largest share of Elim's fleet. There were 36 permits to catch salmon (16 fished). There was one permit to set gillnets in the Lower Yukon River and 35 permits for gillnets in the Norton Sound (15 fished).

*Crab:* One permit was issued for catch king crab with pot gear in a vessel under 60 feet in the Norton Sound (not fished).

There were no real fish landings in the community due to the absence of processing plants. Vessels from this community deliver landings somewhere else, usually to Nome or Unalakleet. Elim does have a buying station for Norton Sound Seafood Products. The NSSP is a company established by the NSEDC (CDQ) as a development project.

Although many neighboring communities received direct economic compensation through federal salmon disaster funds in order to soften the impact of plummeting salmon prices, Elim did not. The NSEDC did receive \$78,599 to reduce the impact of Steller sea lion protective regulations that came up after the inclusion of this species into the endangered species list. The NSEDC, in turn, allocated \$20,000 in community benefits to Elim. This allocation, under

ESA regulations, was implemented in 2002.

### **Sport Fishing**

In 2000 this community issued five sport fishing licenses, all purchased by local residents. This fact however, does not preclude the possibility that the area could have been visited by numerous outsiders who obtained their permits elsewhere. In 2002 the village had no official evidence of any business dealing with sport fishing as either a personal endeavor or as a tourist activity.

### **Subsistence Fishing**

The ADF&G does not have systematic and reliable surveys on the subsistence activities of most of the Norton Sound communities, included Elim. However, evidence from similar communities in similar environments point out that these practices are fundamental to understanding their economy and social structure. An estimate of the ADF&G situates Elim's daily wild food harvest over 1.85 lbs per person. Such a quantity is evidence of the importance of subsistence practices for the local economy.

Additionally, 78 household permits were held in Elim to catch subsistence salmon, accounting for approximately 4,000 fish (mainly pink salmon and coho salmon). Moreover, village inhabitants (as part of a tribe and/or part of a rural community) are eligible for the Subsistence Halibut Registration Certificate (SHARC). These allocations are based on recognized customary and traditional uses of halibut. Regulations to implement subsistence halibut fishing were published in the Federal Register in April 2003 and became effective May 2003.