

# False Pass

## People and Place

### Location

The community of False Pass is located on the eastern shore of the first Aleutian Island, Unimak, on Isanotski Strait, midway between the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska. Located 646 air miles southwest of Anchorage, False Pass encompasses 26.8 square miles of land and 41.4 square miles of water.

### Demographic Profile

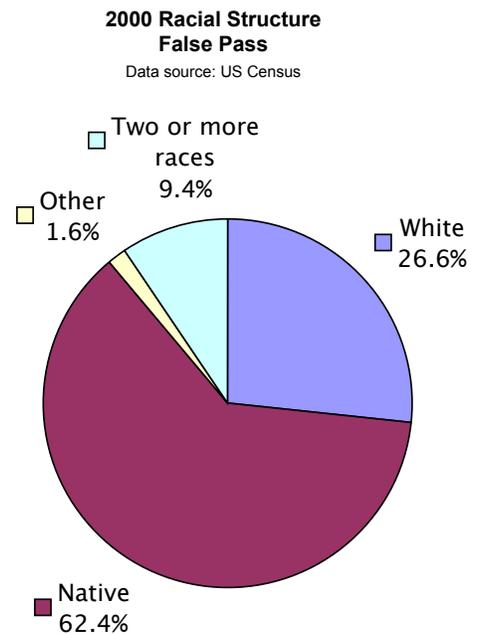
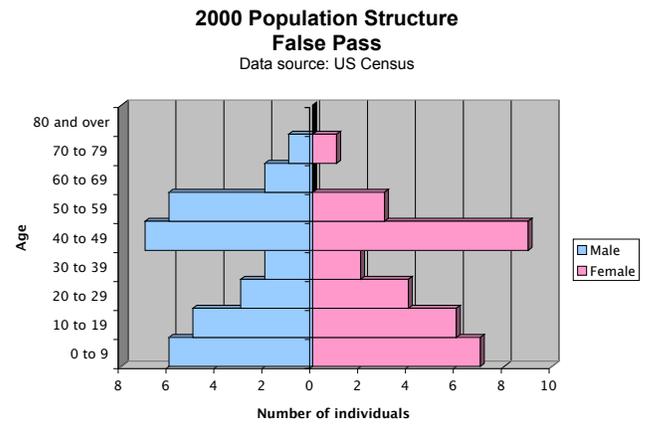
According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of False Pass was 64. Total population numbers have been reasonably stable since the 1930s. Unlike many fishing communities, the genders were in equal balance in False Pass in 2000.

The racial composition of the population in 2000 was: 62.5% Alaska Native or American Indian, 26.6% White, 1.6% other, and 9.4% of the population identified with two or more races. A total of 65.6% of the population recognized themselves as all or part Alaska Native or American Indian. Only 1.6% of the population identified as Hispanic. The median age was 31.5 years which is slightly below the national median of 35.3 years. According to the 2000 census, 37.5% of the population was under 19 years of age while only 10% of the population was over 55 years of age. The pattern of this age structure shows a fairly young population. In fact, about 33% of the population in 2000 was 14 years old or below and the median age in False Pass was 5 years younger than the national average in 2000.

There were 40 housing units in False Pass, 18 of which were vacant in 2000 and of these, 2 were vacant due to seasonal use. At the time of the 2000 census, none of the population lived in group quarters. About 65.2% of the population had a high school diploma or higher, while 17.4% had a bachelor's degree or higher.

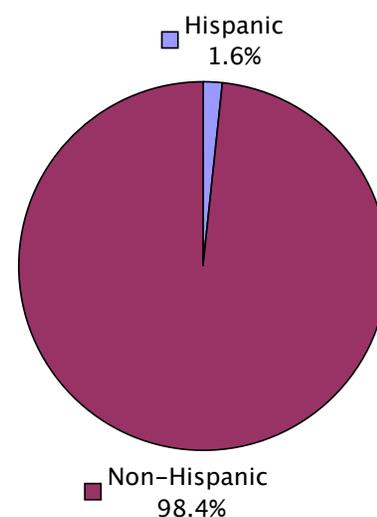
### History

The False Pass area has been inhabited since prehistory by Aleuts or Unangan. At the time of Russian contact during the fur trade in the 18th century, the area had the largest population of Aleuts anywhere in the Aleutian Islands, with twelve Aleut settlements



**2000 Hispanic Ethnicity  
False Pass**

Data source: US Census

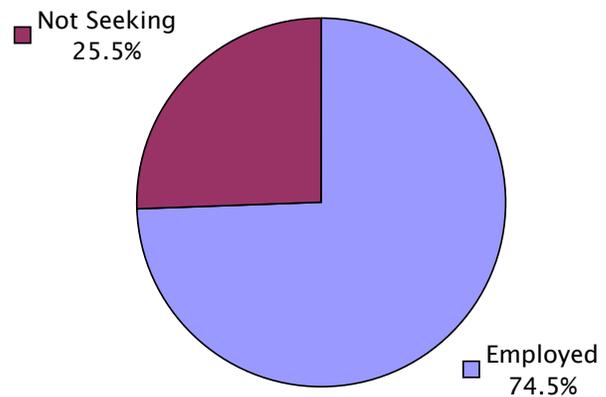


on Unimak Island alone. Disease and war during the Russian fur trade destroyed most of the Aleut settlements in the area, and the Russians consolidated the remnants of the surviving villages into one newly created village on the tip of the Alaska Peninsula on Isanotski Strait, opposite the present community of False Pass. This village was called Morzhovoi.

The P.E. Harris Company from Seattle established a salmon cannery in False Pass in 1919, and the community grew with an increasingly large and diverse population. Alaska Natives immigrated from Akutan, Unalaska, Morzhovoi, Sanak Island, Ikatan, and elsewhere, attracted to the opportunities provided by the cannery. A local post office was established at this time. After Alaska became a U.S. Territory, new immigrants, mostly of Scandinavian origin, began to settle in the area. They brought with them commercial fishing and fish preservation technologies, most importantly salting. The first commercial fisheries in the area were thus focused on salted cod and salmon. In addition, hunting and trapping has been an important means of subsistence for the people of False Pass. People from this area have often moved between nearby towns in the area in response to cannery and school closures. History, family ties, and social networks continue to provide links between local Native communities in the area, so intra-community cohesion is strong (Black and Jacka, 1999). The cannery in False Pass has operated annually, except between 1973 and 1976, when it was closed due to a combination of harsh winters and depleted fish resources. The cannery was subsequently purchased by Peter Pan Seafoods in 1962. It was destroyed by fire in March 1981 and was not rebuilt, leading to some population drain.

Isanotski Strait, accessible by vessels up to 200 feet in length, is the major pass between the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea. For this reason, both Isanotski Strait and the community of False Pass have long been called “the Pass” by fishermen from all over southwestern Alaska. Despite its name, there is nothing “false” about the pass. Because the north entrance to Isanotski Strait is shallow, it was historically very difficult for non-motorized sailing vessels to navigate the channel, so the sailing ship captains gave it the name “False Pass” and the name stuck. False Pass is situated in a volcanic region, but this is not considered to pose an immediate threat.

**2000 Employment Structure  
False Pass**  
Data source: US Census



## Infrastructure

### Current Economy

The local economy of False Pass is driven by the fishing industry, relies on associated services, and is supplemented by subsistence practices and government. A total of 24 commercial fishing permits were held by 11 permit holders in 2000 according to AC FEC. False Pass’ opportune location makes it an important refueling and supply stop for Bristol Bay, Bering Sea and northern Gulf of Alaska fishing fleets.

The City of False Pass has finalized plans for a small boat harbor, which will be built in the summer of 2005. This will allow fishermen and other users to keep boats in protected moorage throughout the year. The Aleutian Pribilof Islands Community Development Association (APICDA), through its subsidiary, Bering Pacific Seafoods, will build a seafood processing plant during the summer of 2005, with plans to make it operational in 2006.

Although False Pass is largely surrounded by the Unimak Wilderness Area (designated in 1980) of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, tourism does not play a significant role in the local economy at this time.

At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, 74.5% of the potential labor force was employed and there was no reported unemployment (those actively seeking work). A total of 25.5% of the population over 16 years of age were not in the labor force (not actively seeking work) and 8% of the population lived below the poverty level. The government is a significant

employer in False Pass; 51.2% of the potential labor force was government workers in 2000. The median household income in the same year was \$49,375 and the per capita income was \$21,465.

## Governance

False Pass is a second-class city that was incorporated in 1990. It is governed locally by a mayor and seven-member city council that meets monthly. Taxes in False Pass include a 2% raw fish tax implemented by the city on local commercial landings and a 3% sales and use tax on goods and services. There is a further 2% raw fish tax from the borough on all landings in the borough. The Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc., a federally recognized non-profit tribal organization of the Aleut people in Alaska which contracts with federal, state and local governments, also provides services in False Pass, some of which include public safety (Village Public Safety Officers) and health programs (emergency, elders, behavioral, outreach and advocacy oriented programs). False Pass is a member of the regional for-profit Aleut Corporation under the Alaska Natives Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Isanotski Corporation is the local Native village corporation. The total land entitlement under ANCSA is almost 80,000 acres. The False Pass Tribal Council is federally recognized and eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). False Pass belongs to the Aleutians East Borough, which is responsible for many services. False Pass is involved in a Community Development Quota program under the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (APICDA) which provides mechanisms for the distribution of money from a fishing quota in the Bering Sea to community development initiatives. The nearest National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regional office is in Unalaska, as is the nearest Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS). The nearest Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) office is seasonally located in Cold Bay (between May and October) while the nearest permanent office is located in Unalaska.

## Facilities

False Pass is accessible only by air and sea. Its location offers protection from ocean swells, and coves within the pass itself provide safe anchorages during severe weather. The pass is almost always free of sea ice. Unimak Pass, at the western end of Unimak

Island, is used only by the largest oceangoing ships; the north channel of Isanotski Strait into the Bering Sea has navigation buoys so that passage is routine and safe. The cost of a round trip flight from False Pass to Anchorage is \$843, which includes \$643 for the Alaska Airlines flight between Anchorage and Cold Bay (based on the closest available date to 1 September 2003), and \$200 for the Pen Air flight between Cold Bay and False Pass three times a week year-round. A state-owned 2,100 foot gravel airstrip and a seaplane base are available. Currently, there is no boat harbor, but a dock and boat ramp are available. A boat haul-out and storage facility are under construction and the need for protected moorage has been identified. The Corps of Engineers is designing a \$13 million small boat harbor, which will be built during the summer of 2005. As of 2003, navigational improvements are also underway. The project is sponsored by the Aleutians East Borough and in cooperation with NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Cargo freighters arrive from Seattle every 2 weeks or every week, depending on demand. The State Ferry operates once a month between May and October from Homer and Seldovia. Local taxi and delivery services exist in False Pass only on demand. Freshwater is supplied by a nearby spring and storage tanks. All residents are connected to the piped water system. The city water system has been upgraded with standard fire hydrants and underground distribution to all residences, but the Peter Pan Seafoods facility has its own above-ground water system. Septic tanks provide for domestic and business sewage disposal. A city-wide sewage system is currently being designed. Electricity is provided by False Pass Electric.

False Pass is within the Aleutians East School District and two teachers currently instruct 12 students in grades K-12 at the False Pass School. Local healthcare is provided by False Pass Health Clinic operated in part by the Borough. Public safety is provided by city police and VPSO associated with the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc. There are no hotels in False Pass, but short-term accommodation is available at the Isanotski Bed and Breakfast.

In February of 2004, Peter Pan decided to put the entire fisheries support facility up for sale. The grocery store and hardware store were closed in July of 2004, but fuel sales continue. Other services previously provided by the company have been eliminated. The local Native Corporation, Isanotski Corporation,

started a new grocery store near the city dock that now serves the community and the fishing fleet.

## **Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries**

### **Commercial Fishing**

Commercial fishing is of great significance to the economy of False Pass. According to the ADF&G, and reported by ACFEC, 24 permits were held by 11 permit holders in 2000 (15 fished). There were two vessel owners in the federal fisheries, 10 vessel owners in the salmon fishery, and 13 licensed crew members claiming residence in False Pass. Although a floating processor facility owned by the APICDA CDQ group was to begin operating in 2000, no commercial landings are recorded in False Pass in 2000 - 2002.

Commercial fishing permits are issued according to specifications of species, vessel size, gear type, and fishing area. Permits issued in False Pass for 2000 were for halibut, herring roe, sablefish, other groundfish, and salmon. Permits for halibut consisted of two hand trolls and one halibut longline vessel over 60 feet (not fished). All permits designated for halibut were for statewide waters. Permits for herring roe consisted of two purse seine limited to the Alaska Peninsula (none fished) and three purse seine limited to Bristol Bay. Permits for groundfish excluding sablefish consisted of one miscellaneous saltwater finfish hand troll with statewide jurisdiction (not fished), one miscellaneous saltwater finfish longline vessel under 60 feet for statewide waters (not fished), two miscellaneous saltwater finfish pot gear vessels under 60 feet for statewide waters (one fished), and two miscellaneous saltwater finfish dinglebar trolls (none fished). Permits for sablefish pertained to one longline vessel under 60 feet for statewide waters. Permits issued for salmon pertained to three purse seine limited to the waters of the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands (two fished), four drift gillnets for the Alaska Peninsula, and two set gillnets for the Alaska Peninsula.

It was announced in July 2003 that False Pass would receive \$27,732 worth of federal salmon disaster relief funds that were distributed to selected municipalities statewide which have been adversely affected by low salmon prices in order to compensate for consequent losses of salmon taxes or raw fish taxes. The Aleutians East Borough, in which False Pass is located, has been allocated \$1,101,638. The disbursement of these disaster funds illustrates the

state response to communities and boroughs affected by recent falling salmon prices due to competition with imported farmed fish. Communities and boroughs are ultimately responsible for the allocation of the funds. Further disbursements are expected in the future to offset the costs of basic public services for which fish taxes become insufficient. In 2002, the Aleutians East Borough received \$140,063 and the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (APICDA) received \$57,163 as part of a federal fund set up in accordance with the Endangered Species Act to offset costs to fisheries and communities due to Steller sea lion protection regulations. False Pass belongs to both the Aleutians East Borough and to APICDA.

### **Sport Fishing**

Recreational sport fishing activity is very limited in False Pass. There were four sport fishing licenses sold in False Pass in 2000, all to False Pass residents and one sport fishing business is currently operating. This may be due in part to the remoteness of the community and the infrequency of transportation from larger population centers. Additionally, the town does not have the facilities to support a significant tourism industry at this time. Sport fish landings data are not available at the community level, however, fish landed under the four local licenses may be included in ADF&G's household use surveys, which are reported below under subsistence.

### **Subsistence Fishing**

Subsistence permits for fishing and hunting are obtained from the ADF&G office in Cold Bay. Data from 1988 compiled on behalf of the ADF&G's Division of Subsistence provides useful information about subsistence practices in False Pass. One hundred percent of households participated in the use of subsistence resources, including harvesting, sharing, and consuming resources, illustrating the importance of subsistence to life in the community. All households used salmon and 95% used non-salmon fish (herring, cod, flounder, greenling, halibut, rockfish, sablefish, sculpin, sole, char, and trout), 60% used marine mammals, and all 100% used marine invertebrates.

The average per capita harvest for 1988 was 412.51 lbs. The total subsistence harvest was composed of 46.82% salmon, 14.65% non-salmon fish, 9.24% land mammals, 6.13% marine mammals, 4.43% birds and eggs, 5.63% marine invertebrates, and 3.09%

vegetation. The wild food harvest in False Pass made up 267% of the recommended dietary allowance of protein in 1988 (corresponding to 49 g of protein per day or 0.424 lbs of wild food per day) (Wolfe, division of Subsistence, ADF&G).

Eight permits were held by households in False Pass for subsistence fishing of salmon according to records from 1999. Coho made up the largest proportion of the salmon harvest, followed by sockeye and chum. Residents of False Pass and members of the Native Village of False Pass, an Alaska Native Tribe, who hold a valid Subsistence Halibut Registration Certificate (SHARC) issued by NMFS, are eligible to harvest subsistence halibut. 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. Registration for the program is still underway.