

Palmer [\(return to communities\)](#)

People and Place

Location

The city of Palmer lies in the center of an agricultural valley, the Matanuska Valley. It is located 42 miles northeast of Anchorage by car on the Glenn Highway. The municipality encompasses 3.8 square miles of land.

Demographic Profile

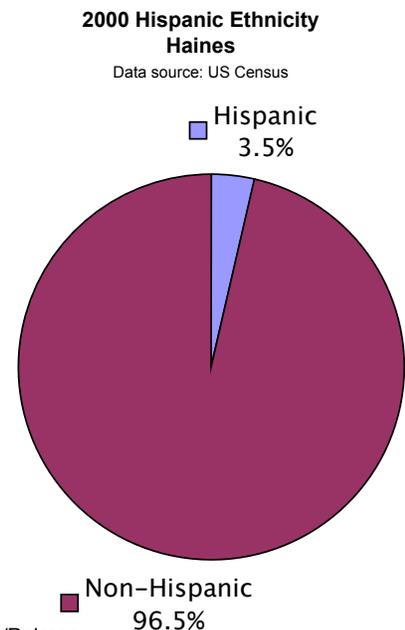
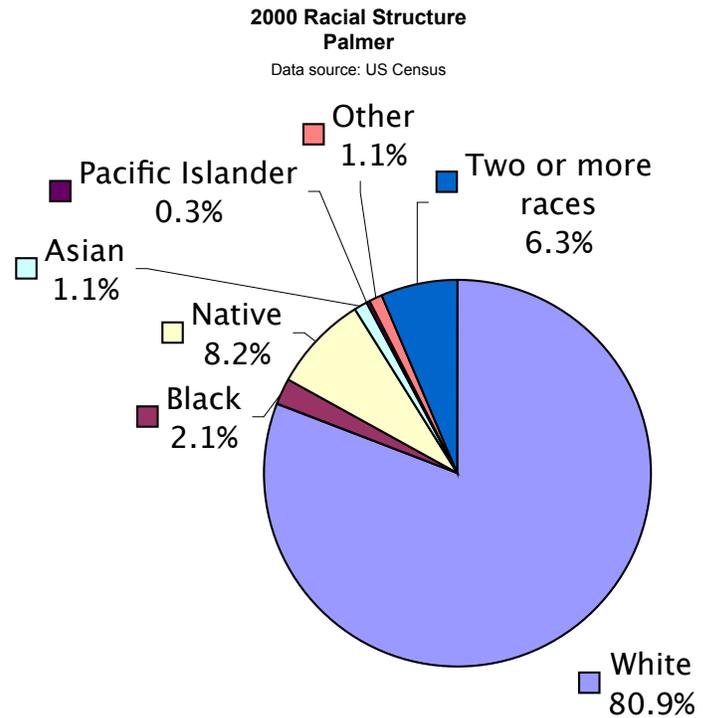
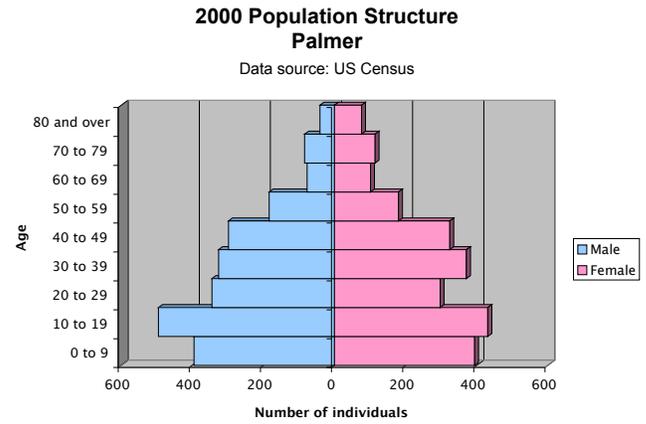
According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Palmer was 4,533. About 8.2% of the recorded inhabitants were Alaska Native, 80.9% White, 2.1% Black, 1.1% Asian, 0.3% Hawaiian Native, 1.1% other, and 6.3% identified with two or more racial categories. A total of 12.5% of the population recognized themselves as all or part Alaska Native or American Indian. At the same time, 3.5% of the population identified themselves as Hispanic.

This community has a fairly balanced gender ratio: 49.5% of the population was male and 50.5% female. A significant minority of only 391 individuals lived in group quarters. The rest of the population lived in households.

The median age in Palmer, 28.8 years, is significantly younger than the national average of 35.3 years. The population jumped from 1,140 in the 1970s to 2,141 in the 1980s, and was stable for a decade with 2,866 inhabitants, but jumped again to 4,533 2000. There was 40.5% of the population between 25 and 54 years old, and 37.9% under 19 years old. Of those age 25 years and over, about 87.5% graduated from high school and went on to further schooling, and 14.5% had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Only 12.5% of the population over age 25 never completed 12th grade.

History

In 1890 George Palmer, a trader from Knik, established a trading post on the Matanuska River. The post was a place of interaction for the increasingly White population interested in mining, logging, and agriculture. Two Athabascan groups (the Ahtna and Dena'ina) had lived in the area for centuries. Their lifestyle was predominantly nomadic, characterized by hunting and gathering practices.



In 1916 a railway station was constructed in Palmer increasing its connectivity with the rest of the state. The early years of Palmer were marked by its almost exclusive agricultural character. An important part of this agricultural history was constituted by the Matanuska Valley Colony (1935). The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, one of the many New Deal relief agencies created by President Roosevelt, planned an agricultural colony in Alaska which was cited for Palmer. Two hundred and three families, mostly from Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, were invited to join the Colony. They arrived in Palmer in the summer of 1935. Despite a high failure rate, many of their descendants still live in the Mat-Su Valley today. The City of Palmer was officially formed in 1951. Construction of the statewide road system and the rapid development of Anchorage have fueled growth in the Mat-Su Valley.

Infrastructure

Current Economy

Palmer, although officially an urban area, is located on the border of rural Alaska. It has a strong agricultural character, but at the same time, its proximity to Anchorage allows many of its residents to commute and to participate in a fully urbanized economy. This dual character has been recently complemented by a growing tourism sector that takes advantage of popular recreational sites such as Hatcher Pass, Crevasse-Moraine Trails, Kepler Lake, Bonnie Lake, Finger Lake, and Long Lake. The increase of tourism has seen an increase in businesses catering to visitors.

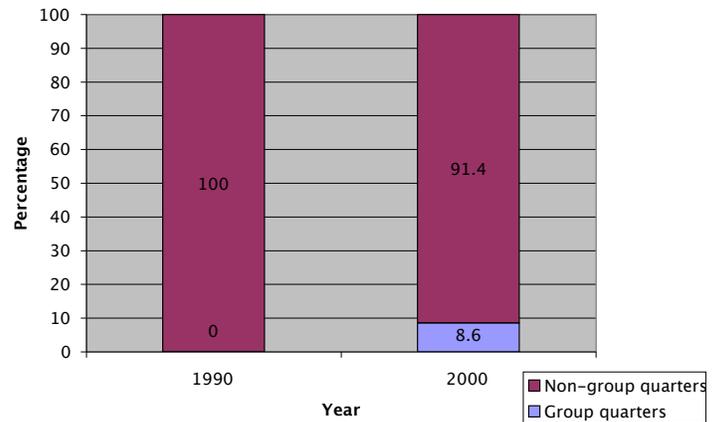
Palmer, as administrative center of the Mat-Su Borough, has also become the center of governmental services for the area (including city, borough, state, and federal services). The community, as with most others in Alaska, is fairly engaged in the North Pacific fishing industry: in 2000, 73 area residents held commercial fishing permits.

Farming includes musk ox ranching, whose underwool (qiviut) is knit into garments by Alaska Native women from several rural villages. Between 2,500 and 3,500 garments are created each year by these women, and sold by an Anchorage cooperative. This farm is also a tourist attraction.

The University has an Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station Office and a district Cooperative

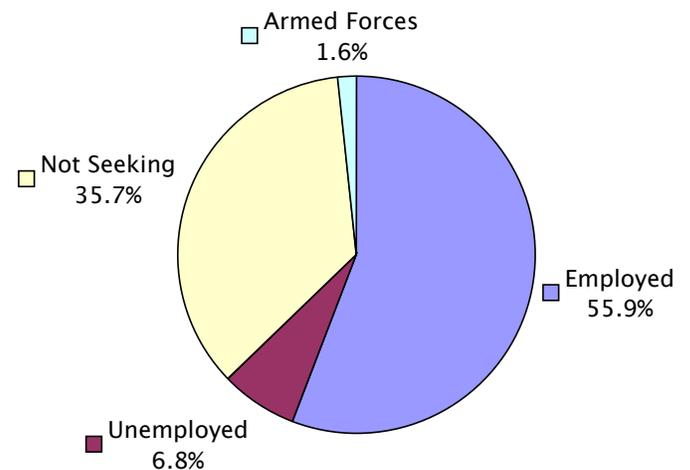
**% Group Quarters
Palmer**

Data source: US Census



**2000 Employment Structure
Palmer**

Data source: US Census



Extension Service office located in Palmer. The University’s Matanuska Research Farm is also here.

The employment structure of the community, as illustrated by Census data, shows that 56% of the total potential labor force was employed at the time of the survey. About 6.8% of the total potential labor force was unemployed, 35.7% of the adult workforce was not searching for employment, and 1.6% was in the military. In Palmer, the average per capita income was \$17,203 and the median household income was \$45,571. In this community a surprisingly high 12.7% of the population was below poverty levels.

Governance

Palmer was incorporated as a Home Rule city in 1951. It is governed by a manager supported by a

seven-member council (mayor included). Palmer has a 3% sales tax, a 5% borough tax on accommodation and 0.2257% and 1.2145% taxes on property administered by the city and the borough, respectively.

The city is the administrative center of the Mat-Su Borough. Palmer is also the home of representatives of the Montana Creek Native Association, a Native village corporation.

The closest regional offices of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) are in Anchorage. Palmer has its own USDA Rural Development office as well as representation from several services of the state of Alaska (i.e. State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, and Division of Agriculture).

Facilities

From a transportation perspective, Palmer is relatively well-connected to the main transport arteries of the state. Glenn Highway runs nearby and Palmer is also connected to the George Parks Highway. The Alaska Railroad connects Palmer to Whittier, Seward, and Anchorage for ocean freight delivery. The Anchorage International Airport is close enough to Palmer to cover its needs for commercial and long distance flights. The Palmer municipal Airport though, is served by private and chartered flights. It has two paved airstrips, one 6,000 feet and the other 3,616 feet. Additionally, the city contains seven more privately owned airstrips. Floatplanes may land at nearby Finger Lake or Wolf Lake.

Palmer has seven schools ranging from kindergarten to high school which have 2,983 students and 168 teachers. Health care is provided by the Valley Hospital (privately owned) and the Palmer Ambulance Service. Long term care is provided by the Palmer's Pioneer Home. The city has local police and a state trooper's station.

Palmer has water and sewage systems operated by the city, although there are also some privately operated wells. Power is provided by Matanuska Electric Association which owns, in part, the Alaska Electric Generation & Transmission Cooperative, Inc. It operates a gas turbine plant in Soldotna and also purchases electricity from Chugach Electric and the Bradley Lake Hydroelectric Project. Piped natural gas, provided by Enstar, is used to heat homes. The Mat-Su Borough operates the landfill in Palmer.

Involvement with North Pacific fisheries

Commercial Fishing

Although Palmer is an inland community, it remains significantly involved in Alaskan fisheries. According to ADF&G records from 2000, Palmer had 72 commercial permit holders with 110 permits in all commercial fisheries (72 fished that year). In Palmer, 108 individuals were registered as crewmen and there were 8 federal fisheries vessel owners as well as 22 owners of salmon vessels. Palmer's fleet was involved, in one way or another, in most of the Alaska fisheries: crab, sablefish, halibut, herring and other groundfish, other shellfish, and salmon. Permits are issued specific to species, size of the vessel, type of gear, and fishing area.

Halibut: There were 12 permits issued affecting halibut fisheries (11 fished): 5 permits for longline vessels over 60 feet (4 fished), and 7 issued and fished permits for longliners under 60 feet, all with statewide range.

Groundfish: Groundfish fisheries issue 18 permits (9 fished). The community had three statewide permits to catch lingcod: one for hand troll (not fished), and two permits for mechanical jig. A total of 15 permits were issued to catch miscellaneous saltwater finfish: 2 for a hand troll vessel (one permit fished), 5 permits for longline vessels under 60 feet (2 fished), one permit for otter trawl (not fished), 4 permits for mechanical jig (2 fished) and one fished permit for pot gear for a vessel 60 feet or over, all with statewide range. Finally there was a non-fished permit to catch demersal shelf rockfish with a longliner under 60 feet.

Salmon: The salmon fleet was the largest component of Palmer's fishery effort in commercial fisheries in 2000. It accounted for 62 permits, 50 of which were fished. There were three purse seine permits restricted to Prince William Sound (one fished), one for the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Islands and one for the southeast. A total of 23 permits for drift gillnet were issued: eight for Prince William Sound, two for Cook Inlet, and 14 for Bristol Bay. The remaining 35 permits were for set gillnet: 18 for Cook Inlet (15 fished), 9 for the Bristol Bay (7 fished), one for the Alaska Peninsula, 4 for the Lower Yukon River (one fished), and 3 non-fished permits for the Upper Yukon, Kotzebue, and Norton Sound respectively.

Herring: A total of 12 permits pertained to herring (3 fished): 6 permits to catch herring roe with

gillnet in Bristol Bay (2 fished), and 4 for gillnet in Secret Cove (one fished). In addition, there were two permits to gather spawn on kelp in Prince William Sound (none fished).

Other fisheries: These, in Palmer, included crab, sablefish, and other shellfish. There were two non-fished Dungeness crab permits to fish with pot gear in vessels over 60 feet in Cook Inlet. Sablefish had three issued and fished permits: two for longliners under 60 feet with statewide range, and one for a longliner over 60 feet fishing in the northern southeast. Finally, other shellfish (sea cucumber) had one non-used permit for diving gear in the southeast.

Sport Fishing

In 2000 this community issued 5,078 sport fishing licenses: 3,255 of them were bought by Alaska residents. The area is visited by numerous non-residents that get their licenses here or elsewhere. The records

of the local chamber of commerce show at least six small businesses that are directly working in different aspects of the recreational fishing industry.

Subsistence Fishing

This community is a Home Rule city located in the Matsu-Susitna Borough. From a federal perspective, Palmer is not considered rural and its inhabitants have no subsistence rights on federal lands. However, subsistence remains important to some of the population. In 1999 there were 46 salmon harvest subsistence permits issued to households by the state of Alaska that accounted for approximately 2,600 sockeye salmon. Other salmon species were caught in smaller amounts. Although 46 permits is a very small number for a community of almost 5,000 inhabitants, it is worth mentioning that subsistence fishing, in urban settings, is often disguised as recreational fishing.