

4.2.3 Kenai Peninsula

Communities

[Anchor Point](#)

[Clam Gulch](#)

[Halibut Cove](#)

[Homer](#)

[Kasilof](#)

[Kenai](#)

[Nikiski](#)

[Nikolaevsk](#)

[Ninilchik](#)

[Port Graham](#)

[Seldovia](#)

[Seward](#)

[Soldotna](#)

[Sterling](#)

Geographic Location

The Kenai Peninsula is located immediately south of Anchorage, at approximately 60.55 °North Lat. and 151.26667 °West Long. 2000 U.S. Census recording districts located on the Peninsula include the Kenai, Seward, Homer, and Seldovia districts. The total land area of the Kenai Peninsula Borough, which includes the Peninsula and some land area across Cook Inlet, is 16,013.3 square miles of land and 8,741.3 square miles of water. The borough includes portions of the Chugach National Forest, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, the Kenai Fjords National Park, and portions of the Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks.

Weather

The Kenai Peninsula is in the maritime climate zone of Alaska. The Alaska Mountain Range, coupled with plentiful moisture, produces relatively moderate temperatures and a fair amount of rainfall. Winters on the Kenai Peninsula are relatively mild compared to other regions of Alaska, with temperatures ranging from 4 ° - 38 °F. Summer temperatures range from 46° - 70 °F. Rainfall totals vary widely on the Peninsula, from an annual average of 20 inches in Kenai to an average of 66 inches in Seward. Snowfall is common in the wintertime.

General Characterization

The Kenai Peninsula is one of the most affluent and developed regions in Alaska, owing to three major factors: commercial fishing, the oil industry, and recreation. Cook Inlet is home to some of the most productive halibut and salmon fisheries in the world. Sport fishing for halibut, salmon, trout, and other species, in saltwater and fresh water (including the famous Kenai River) attracts tourists and fishermen from around the world. Hundreds of thousands of sport fishing licenses are sold on the Peninsula annually. With the discovery of oil in Cook Inlet in the 1950s,

job opportunities and increased incomes caused the population of the Kenai Peninsula to boom.

In terms of demography, the Peninsula is largely White (70-80%), with a relatively balanced male-to-female ratio, owing to the fact that most employment opportunities are not as variable by season as other parts of Alaska.

Institutional Framework

The Kenai Peninsula was incorporated as a second-class borough in 1964. Kenai Peninsula communities profiled in this document include: Anchor Point, Beluga, Clam Gulch, Homer, Kasilof, Kenai, Nikiski, Seldovia, Seward, and Soldotna. Schools are operated by the Kenai Peninsula School District, which had a total of 609 teachers and 9,697 students in 2000. Expenditures were \$7,379 per student in that year.

The Kenai Native Association, an Alaska Native urban corporation, was formed in 1971 in accordance with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). The association engages in activities that promote economic development, environmental conservation, and Native cultural heritage preservation on the Kenai Peninsula.

Commercial, Sport, and Subsistence Fisheries

The importance of fishing activities on the Kenai Peninsula to local and state economic development cannot be overstated. Commercial fleets operate out of the cities with larger ports, and commercial fish processing plants are located in many communities throughout the Peninsula. Fleet activity is concentrated in Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound halibut and salmon fisheries, but vessels operate in the crab, herring, and groundfish fisheries as well.

Sport fishing in both saltwater and freshwater environments is a huge driver of economic growth on

the Peninsula. Sport fishing license sales in the larger towns of Seward, Homer, and Kenai are typically greater than entire local populations, and fishermen from around the world come to enjoy the sport. Major sport species include salmon, halibut, trout, northern pike, and Dolly Varden.

Subsistence fishing and hunting are still relatively important to the local economy on the Kenai Peninsula; about 70-80% of households use subsistence resources. Beginning in 1980 with the adoption of Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), “non-rural” area residents were prohibited from harvesting subsistence resources on federal lands and waters. A 1989 court case, *McDowell v. State of Alaska*, challenged this designation and a decade-long legal battle ensued. By 1999 the federal government had taken over management of its own lands and waters. Peninsula residents designated “non-rural” were now ineligible to harvest on federal lands and waters. Any subsistence activities after this point on the Kenai Peninsula took place on state lands and waters only.

Nevertheless, subsistence hunting for land mammals and fishing for salmon and other species continues.

Regional Challenges

Many issues affecting life on the peninsula are compounded by the region’s rapid population. The larger towns on the peninsula have all seen a doubling or tripling of their populations in the last two decades. This has underscored the need to rapidly develop infrastructure and social services.

Dependence on salmon fishing, combined with falling salmon prices in recent years, has spelled economic hardship for some communities. Homer, Kenai, and Seward have all received substantial sums from federal salmon disaster funds; smaller communities on the peninsula have received lesser amounts.

The controversy over rights to subsistence harvesting, as described above, has also been a sore point for many communities.