

4.2.4 Prince William Sound

Communities

[Cordova](#)

[Fritz Creek](#)

[Valdez](#)

[Whittier](#)

Geographic Location

Prince William Sound is situated between the Kenai Peninsula on the west and Southeast Alaska on the east. The sound consists of a labyrinth of fjords at roughly 61 °North Lat.

Weather

The climate of Prince William Sound is influenced by its coastal location. Temperatures are mild, with average highs in the summertime around 60 °F and average wintertime lows around 20 °F. Precipitation in the Sound is quite heavy, averaging around 60 inches of rain annually. Valdez, located at the north edge of the sound, receives an incredible 325 inches (roughly 27 feet) of snow each year.

General Characterization

Prince William Sound has been the home of Alutiiq (Sugpiaq) people for some 5,000 years. Athabascan and Tlingit groups, who migrated into the sound from other areas, have also been present since prehistory. Since the late 1700s, the region has been a crossroads for explorers, miners, fishermen, and the Native inhabitants of the region. In particular, the presence of a protected, deep-water port at Valdez has been a key ingredient in the development of the region, culminating in the construction of the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline terminus in the 1970s.

Today, Prince William Sound, most of which lies within the Valdez-Cordova Census Area, is home to some 10,000 inhabitants. Most residents live within the large towns of Valdez and Cordova; the other residents are scattered throughout a few dozen small communities. The demographics of the region have changed quite dramatically through time. The construction of the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline, the build-up and withdrawal of U.S. military personnel, particularly in Whittier, and the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill— are all factors that have influenced the

dramatic flux in the composition of Prince William Sound. Today, some 13% of residents are all or part Alaska Native. The gender composition of the region, at over 53% male, reflects the imbalance of labor opportunities.

Institutional Framework

Communities in Prince William Sound belong to the Valdez-Cordova Census Area but are not under the jurisdiction of an organized borough. As a result, the communities themselves are responsible for basic services and tax administration. The communities profiled here also belong to the Prince William Sound Economic Development Council, a forum that deals with regional economic issues and community development. In addition, the communities have membership in the Chugach Corporation, a Native regional corporation created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. Some communities also have Native village councils.

Commercial, Sport, and Subsistence Fisheries

Fishing is a major part of the regional economy in Prince William Sound. The communities here all have significant numbers of registered crew members, vessel owners, and permit holders. In addition, vessels from around the region make landings here; salmon landings alone were made by more than 1,000 vessels in 2000. To that extent, commercial fishing and fish processing account for a large portion of employment opportunities in the region.

Sport and subsistence fishing are also important components of regional involvement in the fishery. Sport fishing license sales for the communities profiled in this section totaled more than the population of the communities combined. A large portion of incoming sport fishermen are from elsewhere in Alaska, but sport fishermen from the lower 48 states and Canada

are increasingly coming to the region. Major sport species include all five species of Pacific salmon, halibut, rockfish, and lingcod.

In addition, more than 95% of local households use subsistence resources, including salmon and non-salmon fish. Annual per capita harvests ranged from 79.9 lbs in Whittier to 179.4 lbs in Cordova.

Regional Challenges

Prince William Sound faces several particular challenges. The first is the result of the 1989 Exxon

Valdez oil spill, which leaked some 11 million gallons of oil into the Sound. Ecological damages and economic losses due to declines in fishing and tourism revenues have been significant.

The second challenge, declining salmon returns, is one that is familiar to many regions in Alaska. Salmon prices have fallen drastically in recent years, in part because of increased foreign competition. Both Valdez and Cordova received relatively small sums to compensate for economic losses due to salmon price declines.