



Fact Sheet: Land Ownership in Alaska

Current land ownership in Alaska can be traced back to four main events in the state's history.

- Russian traders arrived in Alaska in the mid-1700's and established small, scattered trading posts and settlements. Alaska Natives (the Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut peoples) continued as the primary landowners during this period of Russian occupation.
- On October 18, 1867, Russia sold Alaska to the United States government. As a result, the federal government owned the Alaska Territory, approximately 365 million acres (about one-fifth the size of the continental U.S.).
- Alaska became a state in 1959. The federal government granted the new state 28% ownership of its total area. Approximately 103,350,000 acres were selected under three types of grants: Community (400,000 acres), National Forest Community (400,000 acres), and General (102,550,000 acres). Additional territorial grants, for schools, university and mental health trust lands, totaling 1.2 million acres were confirmed with statehood. All grants combined gave the State of Alaska approximately 105.8 million acres.
- In 1971 Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). This law granted 44 million acres and 1 billion dollars to village and native corporations created under the act. Generally, ANCSA gave Native selections priority over state land selections.

State Land

To date, the state has received title to approximately 95% (100.5 million acres) of its total land selections. The state was permitted to select lands from any federal land not already reserved for other uses, to provide:

1. Land and resources to support the state's economy for road construction, economic development, and building houses, schools, and other public and private facilities.
2. A reduction in federal control over state internal affairs by giving the state ownership and jurisdiction over its own land.

The state chose land to meet three specific needs - settlement, resources and recreation.

Settlement – The State of Alaska selected land to encourage development and settlement. Land for public facilities, road construction and other public needs were included. Once owned, the state transfers large tracts of land to local governments, and leases and disposes of land to the private sector. There are approximately 3.15 million acres currently in the state's land disposal bank for eventual lease or sale.

Resources – The Alaskan economy is based on exploration for and the development of natural resources. Lands were selected for agriculture, forestry, commercial fisheries, mining potential, oil and gas development, and wildlife habitat.

Recreation – Lands for wildlife, back-country recreation, and varying degrees and types of developed recreation were chosen and reserved to provide a variety of experiences for Alaskans and the tourist industry.

Once land is selected, land planners develop state land use plans. Planners consider laws and policies set by the Governor and state legislature, the character of the land itself, recommendations made by resource experts and public input to determine the most appropriate management of currently owned or selected state land. Plans are developed for land in selected status in anticipation of its conveyance to the state.

Federal Land

The State of Alaska contains a total of 365,481,600 acres.

The federal government is still the largest landowner in Alaska with 61.3% of the total area (approximately 224 million acres). This acreage includes national parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, military reservations and the North Slope National Petroleum Reserve. More than a dozen federal agencies manage federal lands in Alaska.

Federally owned lands in Alaska are as follows*:

- USFS 22,167,455 acres
- NPS 52,426,440 acres
- FWS 76,617,382 acres
- BLM 72,234,836 acres
- DOD 689,877 acres

For a total of 224,135,990 acres of federally owned lands in Alaska.

*Information gathered from the 2017 Congressional Research Report which reported data from 2015. This report is found at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42346.pdf>

Native Lands

Native lands are private lands. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, passed by Congress in 1971, mandated the creation of regional and village Native corporations for the disbursement of the 44 million acres and payment of one billion dollars mandated to Native ownership.

Thirteen regional corporations were created for the distribution of ANCSA land and money. Twelve of those shared in selection of 16 million acres, the thirteenth corporation, based in Seattle, received a cash settlement only. 224 village corporations, of 25 or more residents, shared 26 million acres. The remaining acres, which include historical sites and existing native-owned lands, went into a land pool to provide land to small villages of less than 25 people.

Other Private Land

Land in private ownership (other than Native land) comprises less than one percent of the total land in Alaska. Much of the best land for development around Alaska's communities is, or will be, privately owned. Private land development meets people's needs by providing places to live, work, shop and recreate. It also provides a tax base for cities and communities to help support public services.