



# Understand Alaska

## **ALASKA TODAY ..... 372**

There's much to debate in Alaska's recent history, from drilling in the ANWR to Sarah Palin's political rise.

## **HISTORY ..... 375**

From the arrival of the first Alaskans to the Valdez disaster, delve into the events that have shaped the youngest state.

## **THE ALASKAN WAY OF LIFE..... 382**

With 70% of Alaskans born elsewhere, uncover what ties them together and defines them as 'Alaskans'.

## **NATIVE ALASKANS ..... 385**

Gain insight into Native Alaskans' art and culture, and the challenges they face in the 21st century.

## **ALASKAN LANDSCAPES ..... 391**

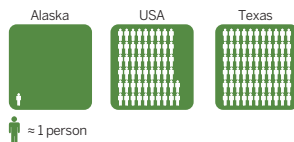
Huge, wild and sparsely populated, Alaska is a land of awesome landscapes, unique vegetation and extreme climate conditions.

## **ALASKAN WILDLIFE ..... 401**

Big or small; feathered, furred or finned, discover Alaska's wildlife and the best places to spot it.



## population per sq mile



# Alaska Today

## Environmental Issues

- » Population: 676,987
- » Land mass: 586,400 sq miles
- » Number of Rhode Islands that could fit into Alaska: 425

In other states protests are staged to save a wetland or a woodlot or a park. In Alaska the battleground is an entire ecosystem. At almost 20 million acres, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is the size of South Carolina, encompassing 18 major rivers and the greatest variety of plant and animal life – including 36 species of land mammals – of any conservation area in the circumpolar north. The North Slope is also home to 36 trillion cubic ft of natural gas, making it one of the world's largest proven reserves.

Alaskans are acutely aware of the issues, both local and global, that they face. Few question global warming in Alaska: receding glaciers, grasshoppers appearing in the Mat-Su Valley, and Native villages slipping into the sea because of melting Arctic ice quickly end any debate about climate change in the Far North. Alaska is known for its abundance of wildlife, yet in 2008 the polar bear was listed as a threatened species by the US Department of the Interior. The number of Cook Inlet beluga whales has decreased so dramatically in recent years that they are being considered for listing under the *Endangered Species Act*, and the king salmon run was so weak up the Yukon River in 2008 that even residents with subsistence rights were restricted from filling their quotas.

## Politics

Alaska was at a low point both financially and politically in 2006 when Sarah Palin, a self-described 'hockey mom' and the former mayor of Wasilla, ran for governor. At the time, three former state legislators had been arrested on public corruption charges, while in Washington, DC, longtime Senator Ted Stevens and Representative Don Young were under

## Media

- » **Anchorage Daily News** ([www.adn.com](http://www.adn.com)) Alaska's largest newspaper
- » **Alaska Magazine** Highlights outdoor and cultural wonders
- » **Alaska Public Radio Network** ([www.akradio.org](http://www.akradio.org)) Has 18 community stations

## Reality TV

- » **The Deadliest Catch** (Discovery Network) Crab fishing in the Bering Sea
- » **Sarah Palin's Alaska** (TLC) Palin observing nature
- » **Alaska State Troopers** (Nat Geo Channel) Law enforcement in the Last Frontier

## Films

- » **Grizzly Man** Follows activist Timothy Treadwell's life (and death) among grizzlies
- » **Alone in the Wilderness** Dick Proenneke documents himself building a cabin in the 1960s
- » **Into the Wild** Adaptation of John Krakauer's book