

APPENDIX D

Socioeconomic Evaluation

Wasilla Airport Master Plan Update Socioeconomic Evaluation

Prepared for:

City of Wasilla



June 2023

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List of Abbreviations

AHFC.....	Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
CDP.....	Census Designated Place
DOLWD.....	Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development
DOT&PF.....	Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
FAA.....	Federal Aviation Administration
IYS.....	FAA Airport Identifier for Wasilla Airport
MSA.....	Metropolitan Statistical Area
MSB.....	Matanuska-Susitna Borough
USCB.....	U.S. Census Bureau

1 INTRODUCTION

Wasilla Airport is a municipal airport owned by the City of Wasilla, located in the southcentral portion of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB). The MSB is located in the southcentral region of Alaska. The City of Wasilla has contracted with HDL Engineering Consultants, LLC to update the Wasilla Airport Master Plan, with supporting economic analysis from subcontractor Northern Economics, Inc.

This stand-alone report provides a socioeconomic profile of the study area (City of Wasilla, Knik-Fairview CDP, and Meadow Lakes CDP), as well as the MSB and the cities and places within it. The socioeconomic profile describes current conditions and forecasts for the population, economy, and key industries, and provides a forecast for aviation growth. The following sections primarily summarize published data and reports from public sources.

2 THE WASILLA AIRPORT

2.1 History of the Wasilla Airport

Wasilla Airport (Federal Aviation Administration [FAA] Identifier IYS) serves a population of approximately 9,200 residents within the City of Wasilla as well as populations in the surrounding communities, notably Meadow Lakes (9,500 residents) to the west and Knik-Fairview (19,500 residents) to the south, for a total of approximately 38,200 residents. The Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOWLD 2022b) reports that the entire MSB has a population of 108,800 people and has been growing rapidly, especially in the vicinity of Wasilla. Wasilla Airport is one of three paved airports in the MSB, with the others located in Talkeetna and Palmer (MSB 2017).

Wasilla Airport was constructed by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) in 1992 with funding from the FAA. The site was selected by DOT&PF in conjunction with FAA after a study of a number of potential sites and completion of an FAA-approved environmental assessment. It was constructed to replace a sub-standard gravel airstrip that had been in downtown Wasilla. Upon completion of the new airport, its ownership was conveyed from the State of Alaska to the City of Wasilla (DOT&PF 2011). Table 1 provides the history of improvements at the airport with FAA participation. The City has also spent approximately \$1.6 million to construct access from Clapp Street (Aviation Avenue) and extend municipal water to the airport.

Table 1. Summary of Previous Wasilla Airport Improvements Grants

Year	Improvement	Estimated Total Cost (Nominal \$)
1988	Acquire Land for Development	2,056,280
1990	Construct Runway 3/21, Taxiway, Apron, Install Runway Lighting, and Improve Access Road	3,801,685
1991	Noise Mitigation Measures for Public Buildings within 75 DNL	925,850
1992	Improve Snow Removal Equipment Building and Acquire Snow Removal Equipment	499,450
1998	Construct Runway 03-21	102,772
1999	Construct Runway 3-21 and Install Perimeter Fencing	1,037,323
2001	Conduct Airport Master Plan Study	407,072
2002	Install Perimeter Fencing	264,264
2003	Construct Apron (Design) Phase 1	199,999
2004	Expand Apron	1,996,879
2005	Construct Apron (Design)	287,440
2006	Construct Runway 03/21 and Phase 1 Apron Construction	4,048,990
2007	Construct Taxiway	1,060,330
2008	Expand Snow Removal Equipment Building Expand SREB and Install Perimeter Fencing	1,340,495
2009	Conduct Aeronautical Survey for WAAS Approach Airport Survey and Update Airport Master Plan Study	474,709
2010	Construct Apron Construction, Apron D (Phase 1)	1,016,148
2011	Conduct Environmental Study Environmental Phase 1	189,420
2011	Construct Apron Construction, Apron D (Phase 2)	1,173,734
2011	Acquire Snow Removal Equipment	779,832
2014	Acquire Safety and/or Security Equipment	564,005
2018	Expand Apron E: 18 Public Use Tie-Downs*	3,871,038
2019	Install Perimeter Fencing Not Required by 49 CFR 1542 Replace Gate and Gate Control, Install Fiber Optic Control System.	362,110
2020	CARES Act Funds	0
2021	Seal Runway and Taxiway Pavement Surface/Pavement Joints	374,904
Total (Nominal \$)		\$ 26,834,729

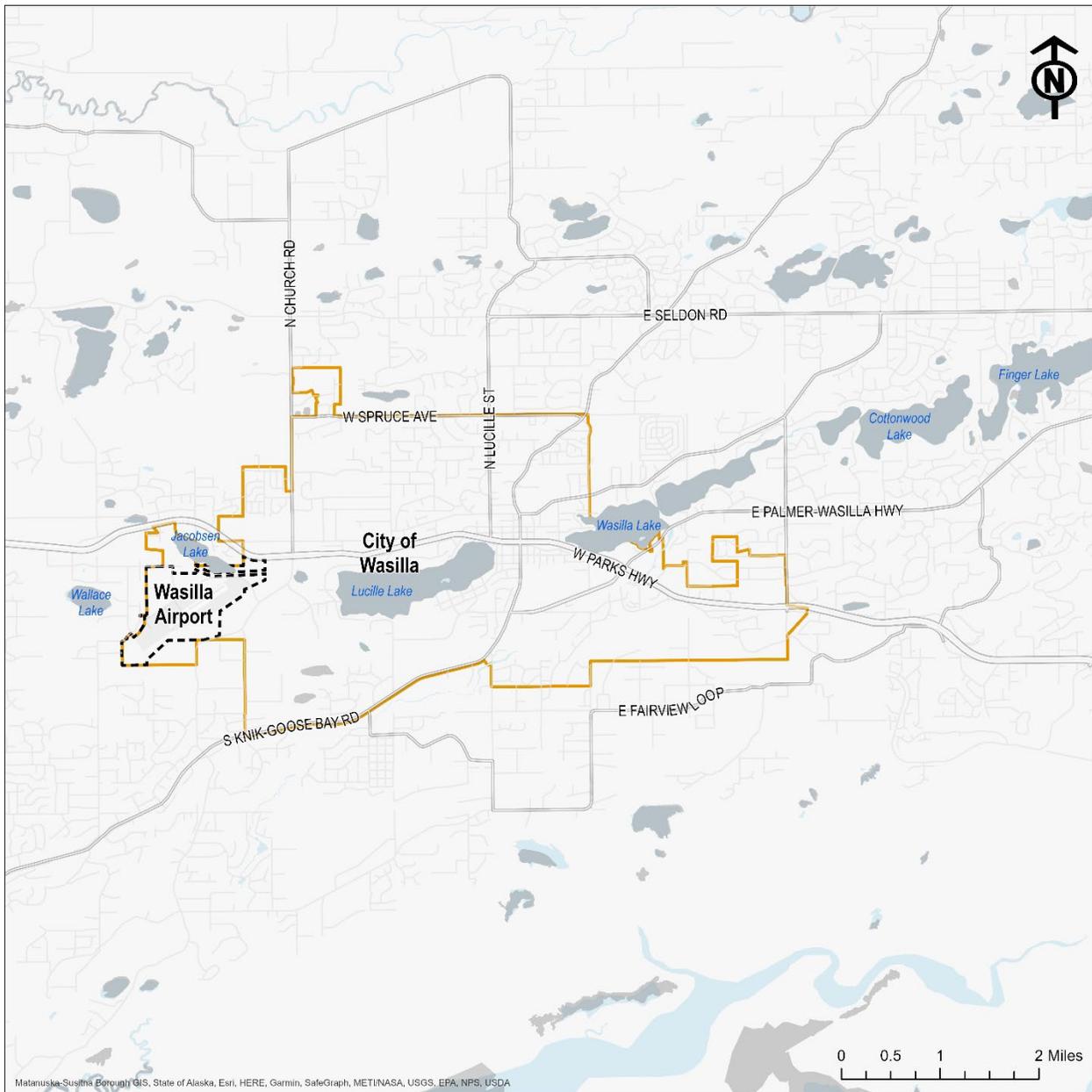
*2018 Expand Apron E: 18 Public Use Tie-Downs actually resulted in the creation of 27 public use tie-downs.

Source: DOT&PF (2022)

2.2 Land Ownership at the Wasilla Airport

Figure 1 shows the location of the Wasilla Airport near the western boundary of the City of Wasilla. The highlighted parcel represents the Wasilla Airport property boundary, which contains City-owned parcels within it. City-owned and privately owned property surrounds Wasilla Airport. Privately owned parcels to the east and south are zoned for industrial use (City of Wasilla 2020).

Figure 1. Area Map of the Wasilla Airport



The land around the Wasilla Airport is currently largely vacant and undeveloped, including the privately owned, industrially zoned parcels located to the south and east. As shown in satellite imagery in Figure 2 (Google n.d.), the areas to the north, east, and south of the airport are mostly undeveloped, except for the Museum of Alaska Transportation to the north. The only adjacent development is a single-family residential area immediately to the west.

Figure 2. Satellite Imagery of the Wasilla Airport and Surrounding Area

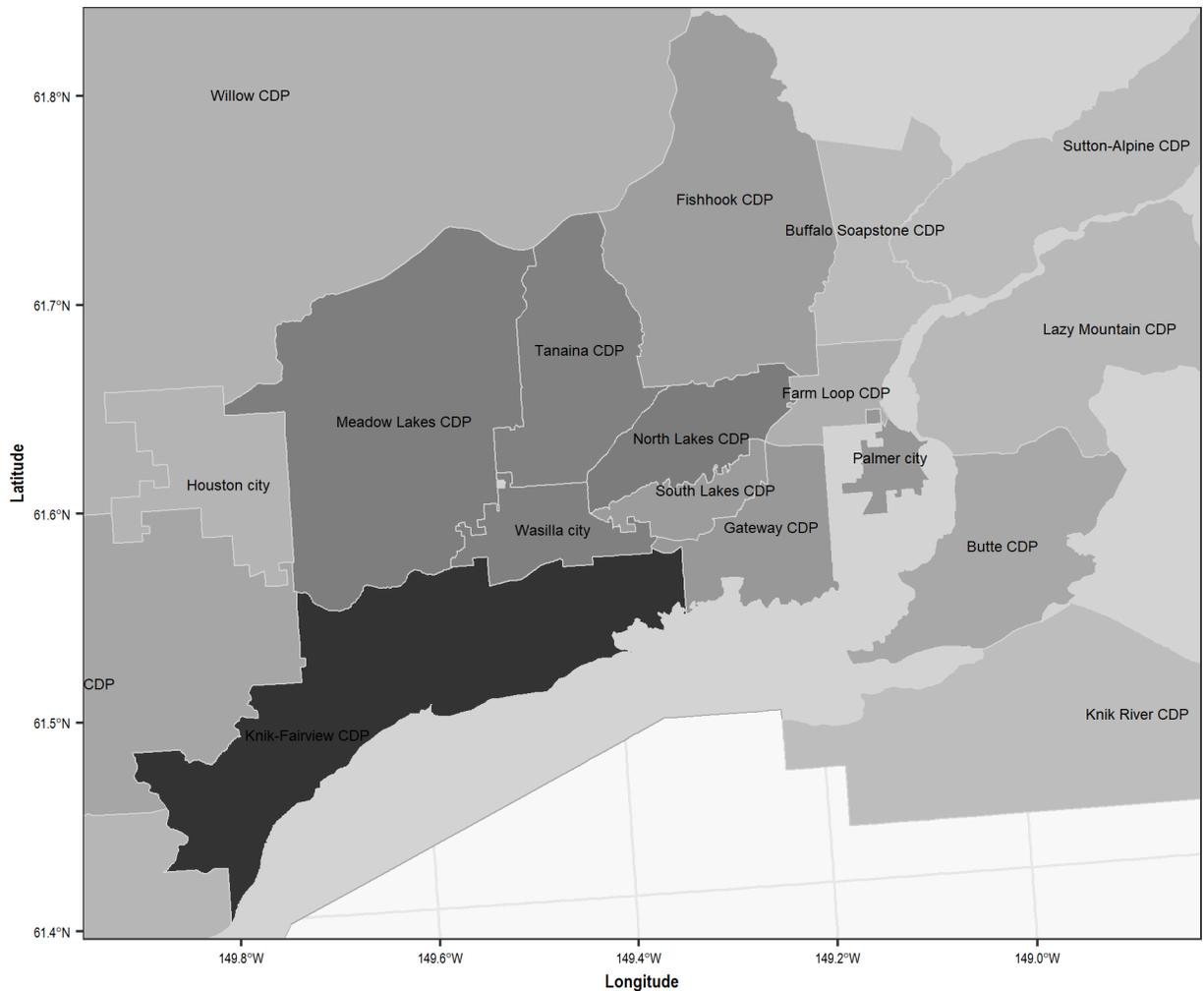


3 DEMOGRAPHICS OF WASILLA AND THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

3.1 Population and Growth

Wasilla is the most populous of the three cities in the MSB, followed closely by the City of Palmer. The other city, Houston, had a 2021 population of under 2,000 residents. Unincorporated areas, shown as Census Designated Places (CDPs), to the south and west of Wasilla have larger populations than the City itself, especially the Knik-Fairview CDP (DOLWD 2022c). Figure 3 shows the relative populations of the cities and CDPs near the City of Wasilla, with darker shading indicating increasing population levels.

Figure 3. Population Levels of Cities and CDPs near the City of Wasilla, 2020



Source: DOLWD (2021a) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

The MSB has experienced rapid growth over the last forty years, from a population of under 18,000 in 1980 to nearly 109,000 in 2021. Table 2 provides population estimates by DOLWD and official decennial census counts. During this period, Wasilla grew from 1,559 residents (smaller than Palmer’s 2,141) to 9,227, an increase of 490 percent. That growth has made Wasilla the largest city in the MSB. The growth in the CDPs surrounding Wasilla has been even greater; the U.S. Census Bureau has added new CDPs over time as those areas have grown (DOLWD 2022c). For example, Big Lake, Talkeetna, and Willow CDPs have been recognized since at least 1980, but the Meadow Lakes CDP was first tracked in the 1990 Census. Others of note for this study, such as Knik-Fairview CDP were added in 2000. Prior to these CDPs being recognized in the Census and in State forecasts, the population in those areas were only tracked as part of the MSB’s overall population.

Table 2. Historical Population of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, by Place, 1980–2021

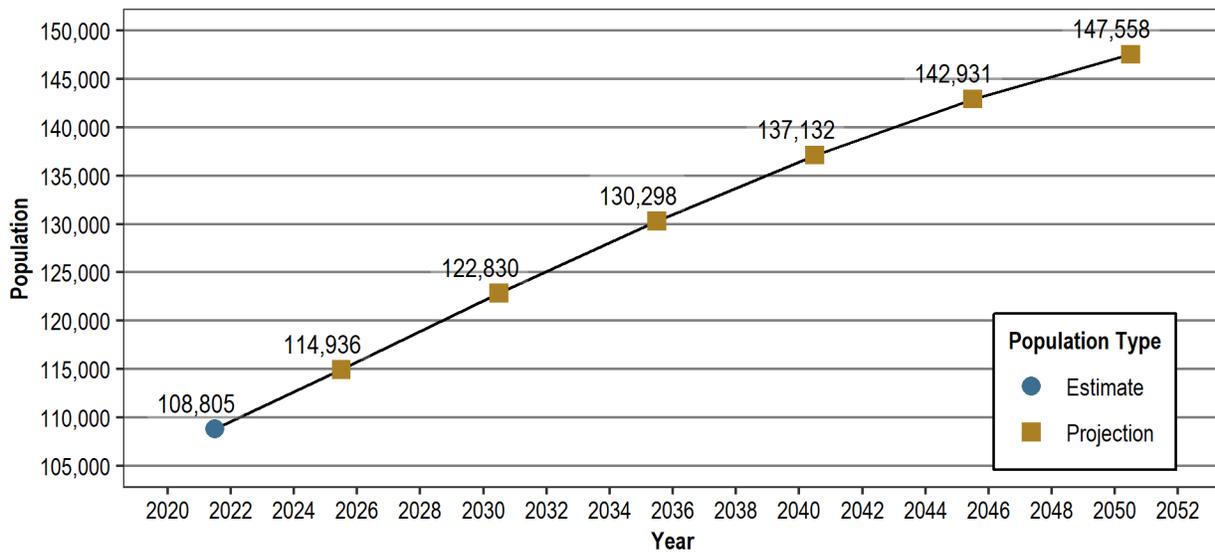
Area	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	17,816	39,683	59,322	88,995	99,960	102,620	104,371	105,414	106,438	107,081	108,805
Big Lake CDP	410	1,477	2,635	3,350	3,578	3,656	3,779	3,763	3,814	3,833	3,946
Buffalo Soapstone CDP	-	-	699	855	907	979	996	1,010	1,001	1,021	1,042
Butte CDP	-	2,039	2,561	3,246	3,489	3,555	3,597	3,613	3,686	3,589	3,545
Chase CDP	-	38	41	34	37	34	33	30	28	19	19
Chickaloon CDP	-	145	213	272	253	253	245	253	271	254	257
Eureka Roadhouse CDP	-	-	-	29	42	44	37	37	36	24	22
Farm Loop CDP	-	-	1,067	1,028	1,142	1,199	1,233	1,296	1,306	2,747	2,748
Fishhook CDP	-	-	2,030	4,679	5,500	5,811	6,186	6,585	6,874	5,048	5,216
Gateway CDP	-	-	2,952	5,552	6,893	7,086	7,240	7,243	7,300	5,748	5,905
Glacier View CDP	-	-	249	234	247	243	239	218	231	375	239
Houston city	370	697	1,202	1,912	2,105	2,164	2,118	2,093	2,112	1,975	1,989
Knik-Fairview CDP	-	-	7,049	14,923	17,517	18,504	18,940	19,357	19,671	19,297	19,476
Knik River CDP	-	272	582	744	733	795	817	827	816	792	841
Lake Louise CDP	-	-	88	46	38	39	32	27	31	15	35
Lazy Mountain CDP	-	838	1,158	1,479	1,572	1,555	1,561	1,555	1,513	1,506	1,572
Meadow Lakes CDP	-	2,374	4,819	7,570	8,347	8,548	8,771	9,168	9,284	9,197	9,485
North Lakes CDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9,450	9,733
Palmer city	2,141	2,866	4,533	5,937	6,126	6,271	6,308	6,204	6,041	5,888	5,932
Petersville CDP	-	-	27	4	2	4	4	6	8	27	28
Point MacKenzie CDP	-	-	111	529	1,922	1,760	1,991	1,964	2,055	1,852	2,087
Skwentna CDP	-	85	111	37	35	35	35	35	30	62	60
South Lakes CDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,229	5,173
Susitna CDP	-	-	37	18	18	16	15	15	16	11	10
Susitna North CDP	-	-	956	1,260	1,426	1,503	1,535	1,614	1,696	1,564	1,598
Sutton-Alpine CDP	182	308	1,080	1,447	1,416	1,430	969	1,043	1,041	1,038	1,024
Talkeetna CDP	264	250	772	876	872	899	910	925	931	1,055	1,066
Tanaina CDP	-	-	4,993	8,197	9,059	9,129	9,245	9,027	9,153	8,817	8,826
Trapper Creek CDP	-	296	423	481	475	485	431	444	453	499	497
Wasilla city	1,559	4,028	5,469	7,831	8,449	8,712	8,830	8,780	8,736	9,054	9,227
Willow CDP	139	285	1,658	2,102	2,005	2,052	2,101	2,136	2,141	2,196	2,278

Source: DOLWD (2022b)

Note: - indicates areas for which there were no estimates of their populations prior to being recognized as CDPs.

DOLWD (2022c) forecasts growth at the borough level and expects the MSB to grow from its population of 108,805 in 2021 to over 147,000 by 2050, as shown in Figure 4. The population is expected to be close to 120,000 in 2028 (five years from the date of this evaluation), over 125,000 in ten years, and approaching 140,000 in twenty years. It is important to note that the forecast is based on natural changes (births and deaths) and net migration patterns from the MSB’s history. Changes to the MSB’s economy could also affect the growth it experiences in the future.

Figure 4. Population Projection for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2021–2050



Source: DOLWD (2022c)

Table 3 provides estimated changes in the Alaska, MSB, and study area populations over time, through 2050.

Table 3. Projected Change in Population for Alaska, the MSB, and the Study Area, 2021–2050

Area	Total Population Change (Percent)					
	2021-2025	2025-2030	2030-2035	2035-2040	2040-2045	2045-2050
Alaska	0.82	1.29	0.80	0.43	0.10	-0.11
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	5.63	6.87	6.08	5.24	4.23	3.24
Study Area	8.60	8.81	7.82	6.84	5.73	3.42
City of Wasilla	7.41	7.84	7.05	6.18	5.18	2.93
Knik-Fairview CDP	9.62	9.34	8.25	7.18	6.03	3.67
Meadow Lakes CDP	7.66	8.65	7.69	6.72	5.64	3.33

Source: ADOLWD (2022c) for Alaska and Matanuska-Susitna Borough; Northern Economics, Inc. internal estimates for City of Wasilla, Knik-Fairview CDP, Meadow Lakes CDP, and the study area; and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

3.2 Seasonality of Population

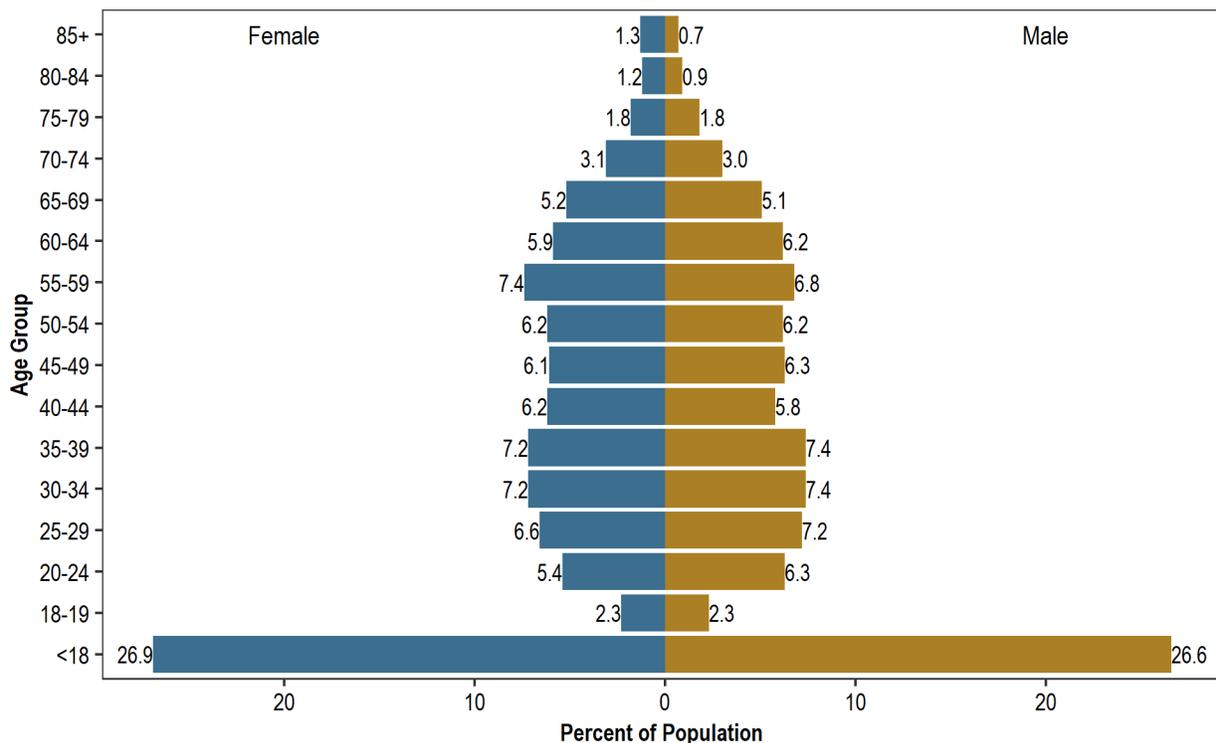
Data is not available to access the seasonality of Wasilla’s resident population. Though the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) collects quarterly housing vacancy data for metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), Anchorage, AK MSA (which includes the MSB) is not large enough to have data (Callis 2022). Vacancy data for rental properties, which could speak to seasonal shifts in resident population, are only available on an annual basis from the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC). It is worth noting that Wasilla had the lowest rental vacancy rate of any area when measured in 2022, at 2.13 percent (AHFC 2022). Seasonality of employment is another potential indicator of the seasonality of resident population, though data is only available for the MSB. See Section 4.4 for the seasonality of employment by industry.

Some Alaska residents are snowbirds, spending winters in a more temperate climate in another state. However, anecdotally, one real estate professional in the MSB thought that the snowbird population within the Wasilla city limits was very small and only slightly higher in surrounding areas. The rental market is also very tight. He estimated that the seasonal swing in residential population was at most ± 5 percent (Van Diest 2022). Similarly, the tourist population is higher in the summer months and at certain other times (such as the start of the Iditarod), though the tourist population has a varying effect on airport demand. For example, while much of the highway-based tourism activity common in the summer months may not have as much of an impact on airport demand, the higher visitor numbers do have the potential to affect air taxi and flight seeing operations, especially with the large helicopter presence at the airport.

3.3 Age Distribution

USCB surveys show that over 26 percent of the population of both males and females in the MSB is under 18 years old (see Figure 5) (USCB 2022). The population of under 18 year olds is important for natural population growth and the entire range of the 20s to the 60s is important for the labor force.

Figure 5. Population Pyramid for Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2020

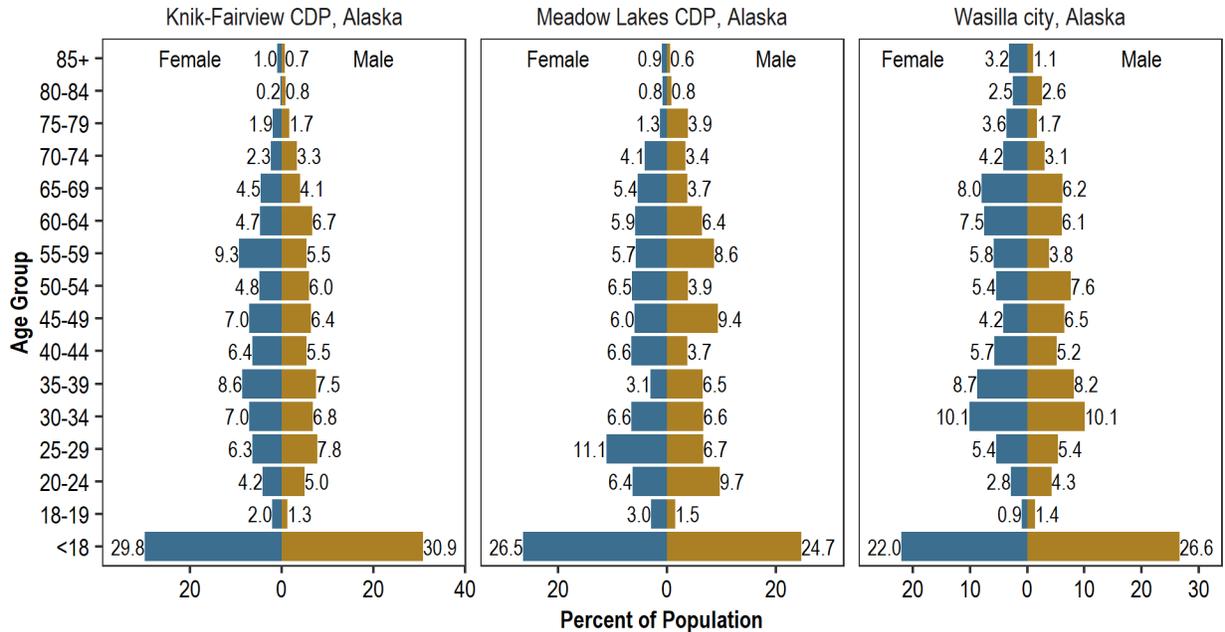


Source: USCB (2022) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

Figure 6 presents the population profile for Wasilla and the CDPs that directly surround it. While the age distributions are generally the same, each area has some unique characteristics. For

instance, Wasilla has a larger population of those in their 30s and the Knik-Fairview CDP’s has a larger youth population (USCB 2022).

Figure 6. Population Pyramid for the Study Area, 2020



Source: USCB (2022) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

3.4 Race and Ethnicity

The MSB’s white population makes up almost 82 percent of the total, followed by those of two or more races (8.4 percent) and American Indian or Alaska Native descent (6.0 percent). Almost 5.0 percent of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino. This racial and ethnic makeup is fairly consistent around the MSB, though with variations in some areas. The City of Wasilla’s population is quite similar to that of the MSB as a whole (USCB 2022).

Table 4. Race and Ethnicity Characteristics, Matanuska-Susitna Borough and its Communities, 2020

Area	Estimated Percentage of Population by Race							Estimated Population that is Hispanic or Latino
	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races	White	
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	6.0	1.5	1.4	0.3	0.6	8.4	81.8	4.8
Big Lake CDP	9.9	0.8	0.0	0.2	0.4	5.8	83.0	3.4
Buffalo Soapstone CDP	4.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5	85.2	4.5
Butte CDP	2.5	3.1	0.9	0.1	0.8	9.7	82.8	1.7
Chickaloon CDP	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.0	89.0	4.4
Farm Loop CDP	3.3	0.2	0.8	0.0	0.4	6.8	88.5	2.4
Fishhook CDP	7.1	2.0	4.2	0.0	0.3	6.7	79.7	9.6
Gateway CDP	4.8	0.3	4.8	0.0	1.3	10.7	78.1	5.1
Glacier View CDP	3.4	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8	90.9	4.0
Houston city	4.6	0.5	1.8	0.2	0.0	5.5	87.4	5.7
Knik River CDP	10.9	0.5	0.4	0.0	0.0	3.2	85.0	4.2
Knik-Fairview CDP	6.8	1.3	1.1	0.0	0.2	9.1	81.5	2.0
Lazy Mountain CDP	4.5	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.3	2.3	91.8	5.2
Meadow Lakes CDP	3.9	2.3	0.3	0.0	0.8	6.3	86.4	4.8
Nelchina CDP	3.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	32.6	63.9	32.6
North Lakes CDP	4.0	1.3	0.7	0.2	0.7	10.7	82.4	5.3
Palmer city	8.7	1.2	2.9	2.4	1.4	11.6	71.7	7.0
Point MacKenzie CDP	20.7	0.3	2.9	2.2	0.0	14.7	59.2	1.1
Skwentna CDP	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
South Lakes CDP	3.4	0.6	1.3	0.1	0.6	8.2	85.8	7.2
Susitna North CDP	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.6	83.4	5.3
Sutton-Alpine CDP	16.2	3.0	0.1	0.0	2.8	10.8	67.0	2.5
Talkeetna CDP	0.3	0.2	0.9	0.0	0.0	3.7	95.0	0.7
Tanaina CDP	7.7	1.2	0.1	0.1	0.5	8.8	81.5	7.2
Trapper Creek CDP	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.8	82.9	0.0
Wasilla city	5.9	3.9	1.8	0.5	0.4	6.1	81.3	5.8
Willow CDP	5.6	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	5.4	88.4	0.9

Note: CDPs without data available have been omitted.

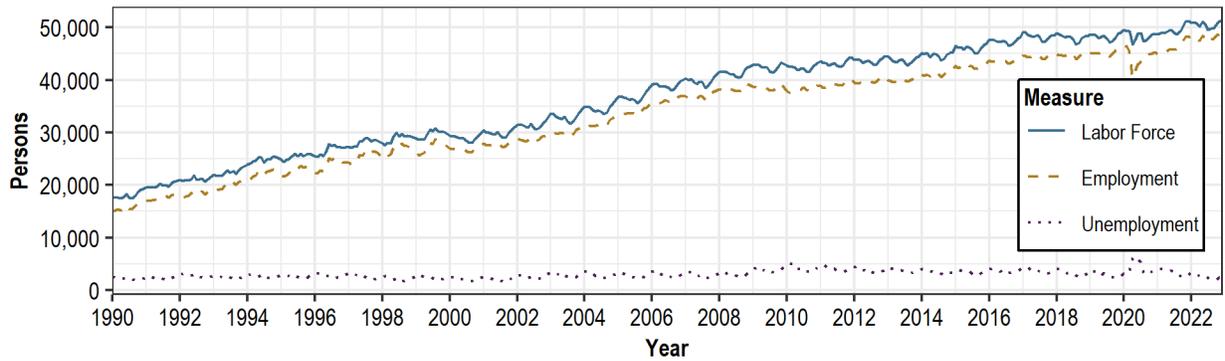
Source: USCB (2022) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

4 ECONOMY OF THE WASILLA AREA

4.1 Employment

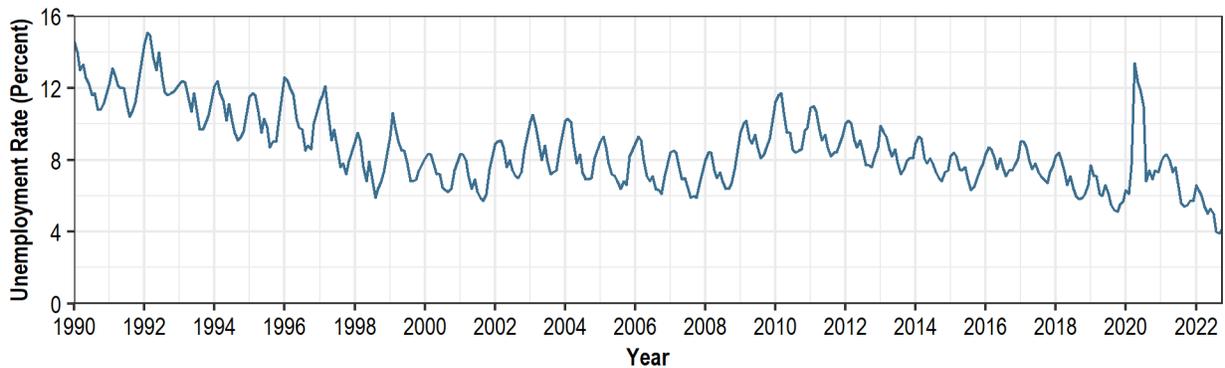
The MSB has experienced a rapidly growing labor force along with its population growth. Presently there are about 50,000 members in the labor force (see Figure 7) which is slightly less than half of the MSB’s population. Employment levels have largely tracked with the labor force, with the most notable exception in early 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time, however, the labor force and employment levels are nearly back to the highs they saw at the start of 2020 and the unemployment rate is at a 30-year low (DOLWD 2022a). Figure 8 provides a closer look at the unemployment rate, which, as of mid-2022, had dropped to only 4 percent (DOLWD 2022a).

Figure 7. Labor Force, Employment, and Unemployment in Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 1990–2022



Source: DOLWD (2022a)

Figure 8. Unemployment Rate in Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 1990–2022

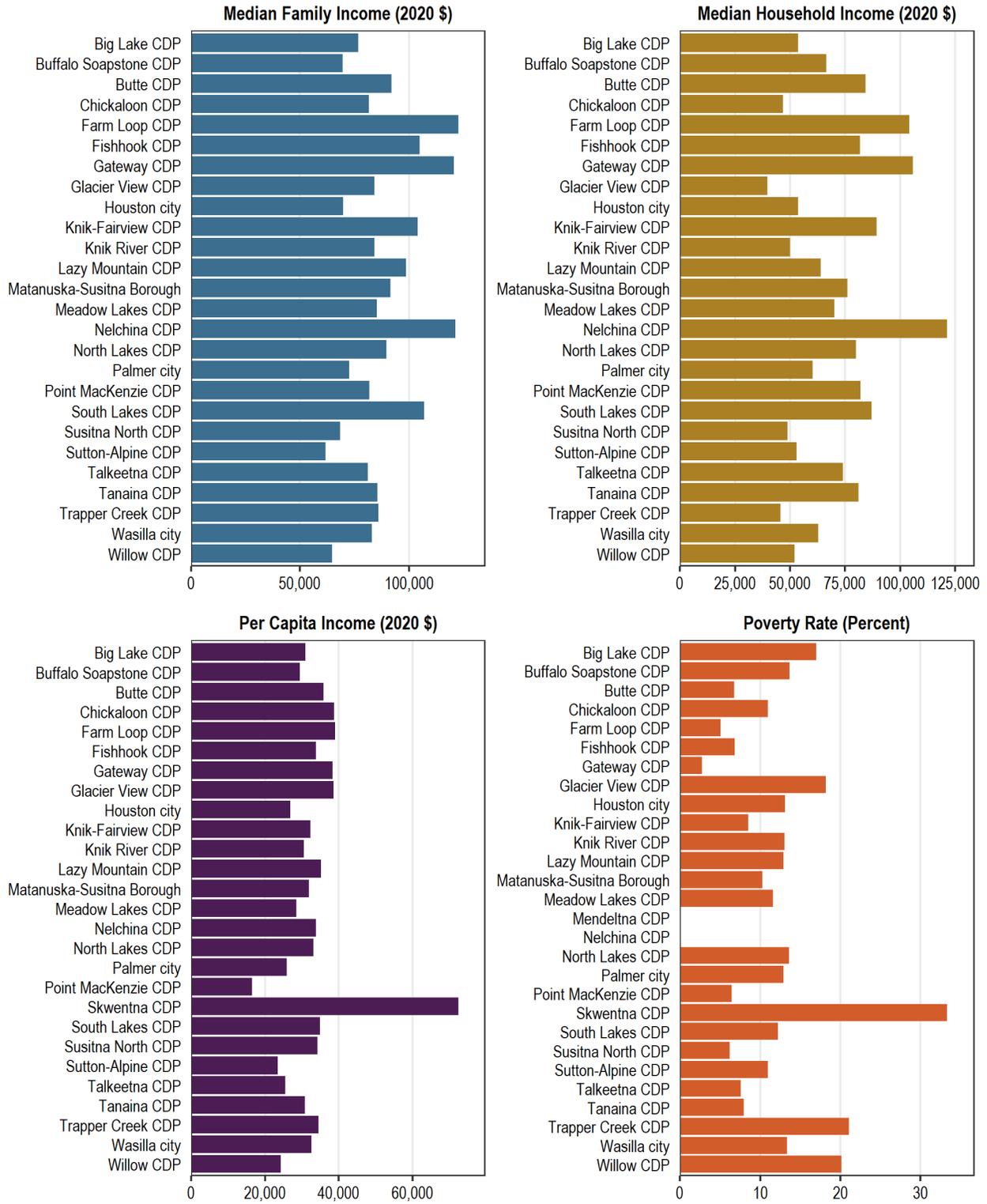


Source: DOLWD (2022a)

4.2 Income and Poverty Status

The MSB’s median family income was \$91,597 in 2020, with a median household income (which also includes non-family households) of \$76,118 and a per capita income of \$31,963. Slightly more than 10 percent of residents have incomes below the poverty level. Figure 9 shows these income measures for each of the cities and CDPs for which estimates are available. Wasilla’s population generally has a lower income than the MSB’s average, while the Knik-Fairview CDP’s income is higher (USCB 2022).

Figure 9. Income and Poverty in Matanuska-Susitna Borough and its Communities, 2020

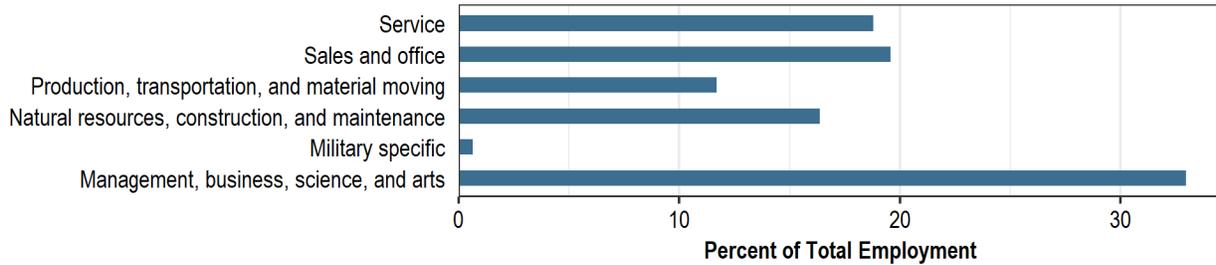


Source: USCB (2022) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

4.3 Occupations

USCB (2022) occupation data show that the largest occupational group in the MSB is *management, business, science, and arts*, at one-third of the workforce. *Sales and office* and *service* occupations make up slightly more than another third (see Figure 10).

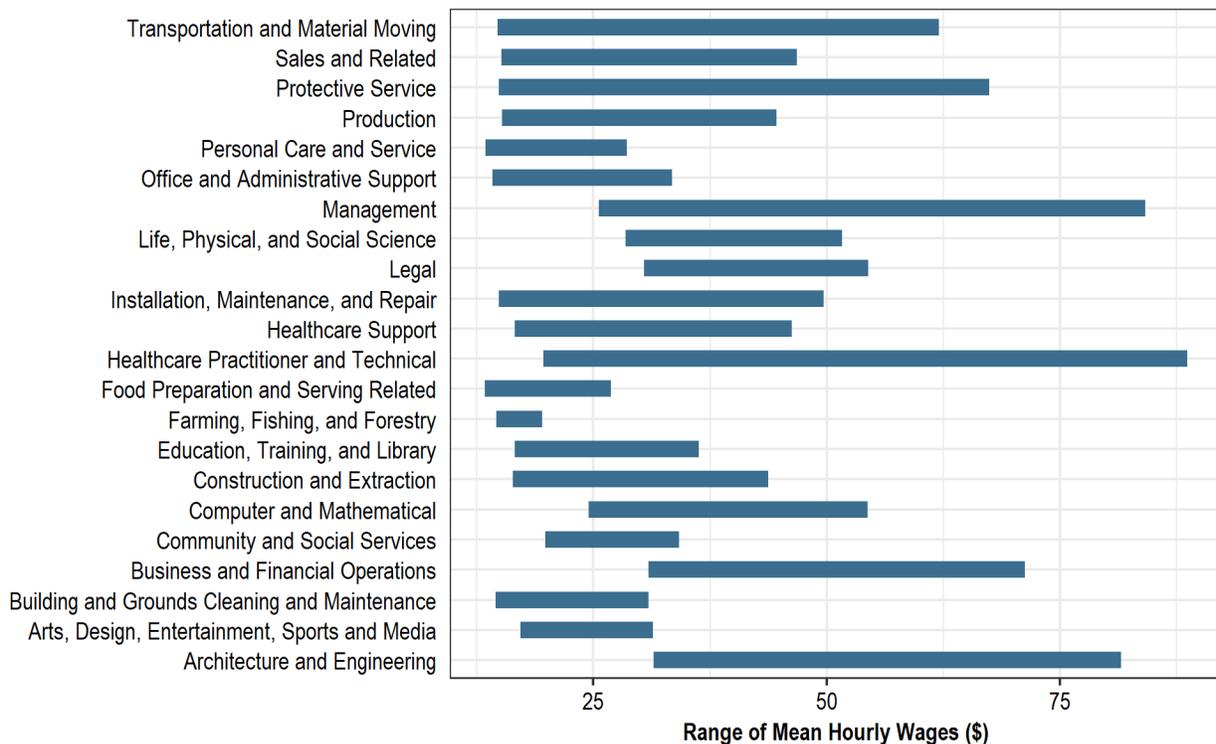
Figure 10. Occupations in Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2020



Source: USCB (2022) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

Hourly wage data by occupation are available from the DOWLD (2022d). Figure 11 shows the range of mean hourly wages by category for the Anchorage/MSB region. Note that some occupations are excluded. The highest paying occupation groups are healthcare practitioner and technical, management, and architecture and engineering occupations.

Figure 11. Mean Occupational Hourly Wages for Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna Borough Region, 2021



Note: Occupations with hourly wages over \$100 or only annual salaries are omitted.

Source: DOWLD (2022d) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

4.4 Industries

The employment levels in most of the MSB’s industries are seasonal. Some industries understandably historically peak during the summer months (e.g., agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting; construction; and accommodations and food service) while others historically peak during the winter. Table 5 shows the monthly employment by industry for the MSB in 2021, along with the average monthly employment and wages (DOLWD 2022e). Note that this table shows employment but not self-employment, so it underrepresents industries with more self-employed persons.

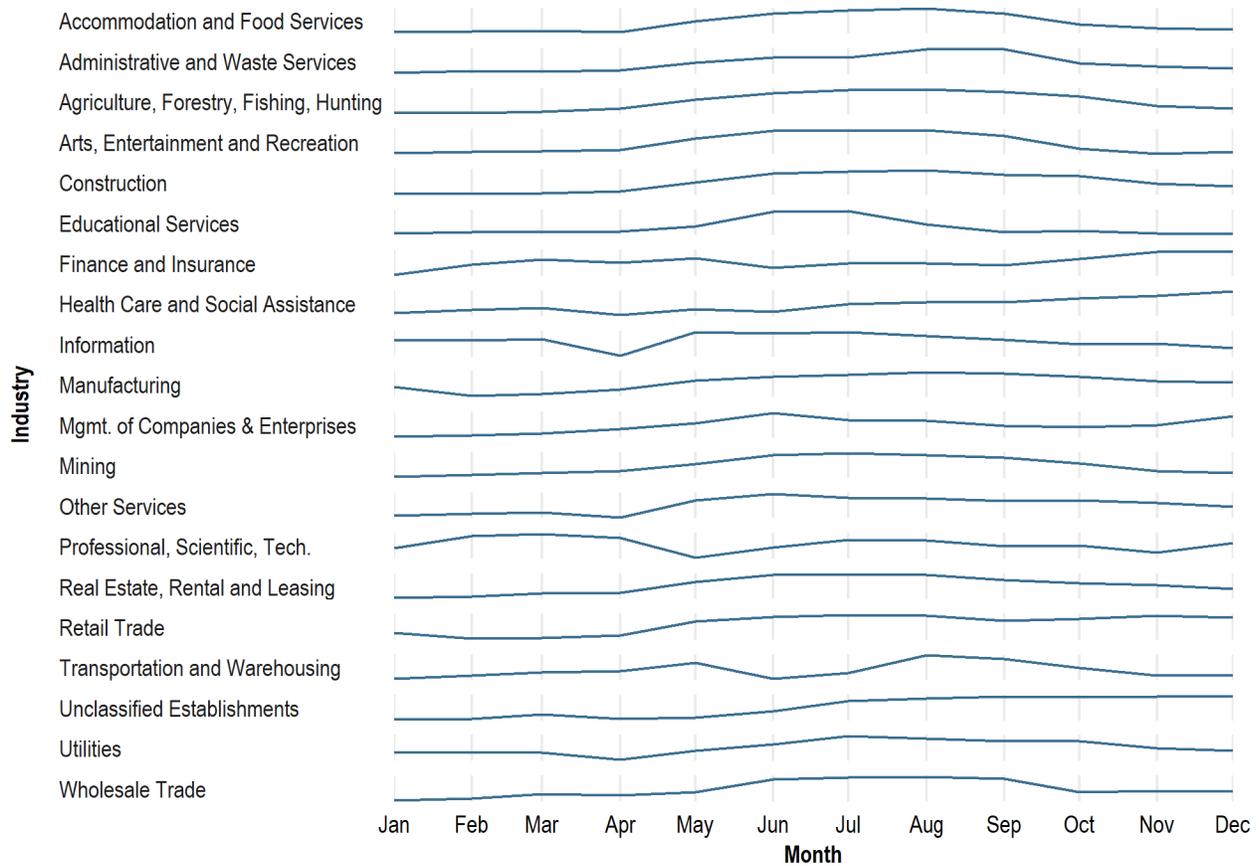
Table 5. Monthly Employment and Wages by Industry, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2021

Industry	Monthly Employment												Average Monthly Employment	Average Monthly Wages (\$)
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec		
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting	183	189	183	190	220	237	241	241	220	192	154	148	200	2,191
Mining	25	28	42	37	50	92	100	88	74	65	52	56	59	6,870
Construction	2,369	2,407	2,413	2,521	2,783	3,142	3,219	3,235	3,151	3,075	2,822	2,738	2,823	6,428
Manufacturing	317	305	310	330	348	359	361	371	366	355	344	358	344	3,811
Wholesale Trade	166	167	169	173	174	181	191	193	195	178	184	181	179	4,911
Retail Trade	4,247	4,150	4,170	4,114	4,162	4,214	4,248	4,205	4,156	4,208	4,283	4,300	4,205	2,991
Transportation and Warehousing	694	725	753	767	790	670	717	777	763	777	724	713	739	4,147
Utilities	336	339	340	319	338	340	344	340	336	332	327	326	335	7,460
Information	429	429	423	433	447	447	462	461	466	459	454	443	446	6,392
Finance and Insurance	507	513	514	515	503	507	511	511	510	511	511	511	510	5,457
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	368	373	401	399	410	440	440	432	424	415	418	410	411	3,391
Professional, Scientific, Tech.	761	778	794	791	790	816	798	773	769	768	750	731	777	5,207
Mgmt. of Companies & Enterprises	75	76	80	86	87	87	85	82	84	86	87	90	84	5,105
Administrative and Waste Services	623	636	645	627	746	840	833	992	927	765	728	730	758	3,425
Educational Services	342	349	362	382	399	451	432	403	381	365	366	365	383	3,007
Health Care and Social Assistance	5,021	5,181	5,137	5,225	5,244	5,208	5,190	5,169	5,168	5,205	5,234	5,280	5,189	4,318
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	293	307	317	334	418	562	581	556	460	386	347	361	410	1,935
Accommodation and Food Services	2,211	2,311	2,351	2,402	2,610	2,748	2,932	2,952	2,944	2,567	2,419	2,393	2,570	2,032
Other Services	924	943	936	981	1,022	1,045	1,022	1,011	1,000	1,005	995	996	990	2,631
Unclassified Establishments	13	13	13	13	15	18	20	20	17	24	25	26	18	2,609

Source: DOLWD (2022e)

Figure 12 shows the seasonality that each industry exhibited from 2015 to 2021. As noted, some industries have traditionally peaked in the winter months (e.g., professional, scientific, and technical), even though that was not the case in 2021.

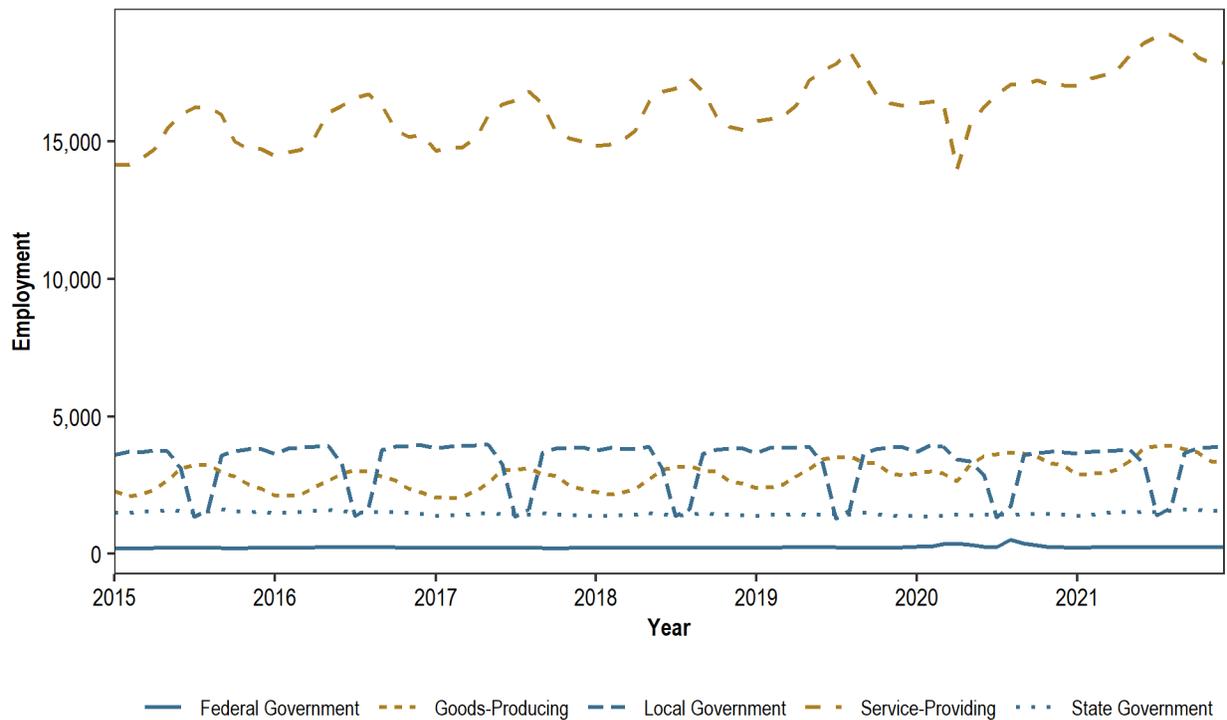
Figure 12. Seasonality of Employment by Private Industry in Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2015–2021



Sources: DOLWD (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b, 2021c, 2022e) and Northern Economics, Inc. analysis

Figure 13 looks more broadly at both public and private employment. The chart shows the seasonality of all industries, including oscillating employment in goods-producing industries, more pronounced changes in the service-providing industries, and the relative stability of federal and state government. Note that school district employment is captured under local government, which causes local government employment to exhibit seasonality during the summer months when teachers and other school staff do not work.

Figure 13. Seasonality of Employment in Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2015–2021



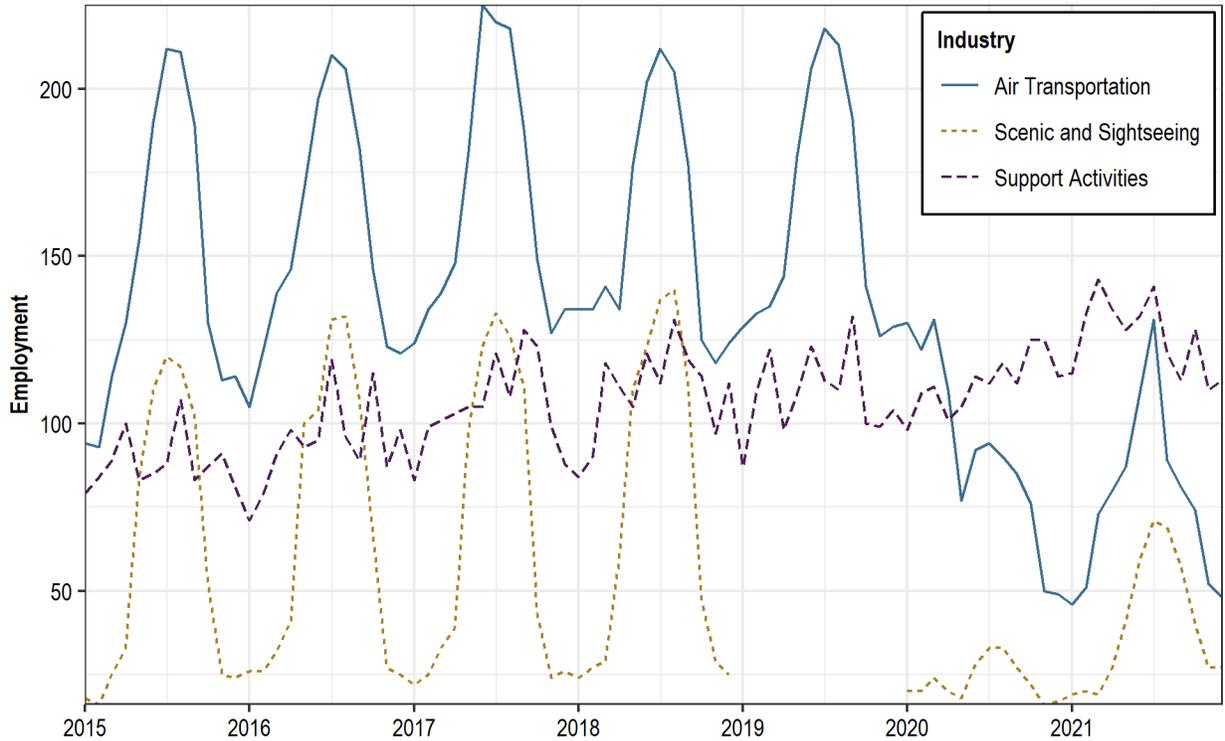
Sources: DOLWD (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b, 2021c, 2022e)

The aviation and tourism sectors are important for evaluating general aviation airports in the MSB like Wasilla Airport. Figure 14 and Figure 15 look at MSB employment in specific industries indicative of the aviation and tourism sectors, respectively. The impact of the pandemic is visible in each figure, though the recovery from it has varied considerably. Employment in aviation-related industries in the MSB had been seasonal but steady over time prior to the pandemic. Since then, however, peak employment in the air transportation and scenic and sightseeing industries has struggled to reach prior’s years’ seasonal lows. However, employment in the support services industry was nearly unaffected by the pandemic and has been on a steady rise.

On the other hand, tourism employment has exhibited a faster return to pre-pandemic levels. Accommodation businesses had a similar number of employees in 2021 as they did in 2015 and scenic and sightseeing employment (shown in Figure 14 but also part of the tourism sector) is still down, but food services and amusement employment has mostly recovered.

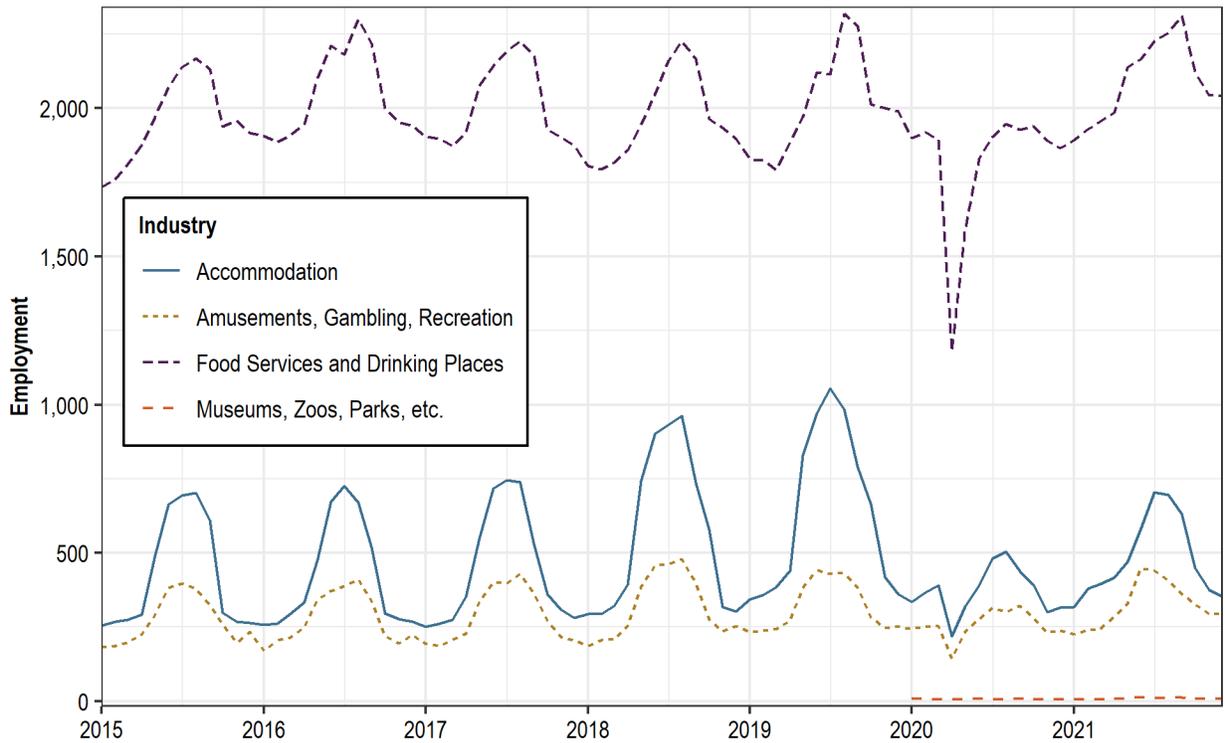
Note that scenic and sightseeing employment was not available in Figure 14 due to confidentiality restrictions based on the number of active companies. Likewise, museum, park, and zoo employment, shown in Figure 15, is not available prior to 2020. That industry peaked at only 8 employees in 2020 and 13 employees in 2021.

Figure 14. Industry Employment Related to Aviation, 2015–2021



Sources: DOLWD (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b, 2021c, 2022e)

Figure 15. Industry Employment Related to Tourism, 2015–2021



Sources: DOLWD (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b, 2021c, 2022e)

4.5 Outlook

As a general aviation airport, Wasilla Airport should benefit from continued population growth in the MSB, much of which will likely take place in the fast-growing areas near the airport. Population-based demand for the airport and aviation services will likely remain strong and increase with population. This is consistent with the steadily rising employment in the transportation support services industry, despite other aviation-related industries having not yet recovered to pre-pandemic employment levels.

5 AVIATION DEMAND PROJECTIONS

This section provides low, base, and high forecasts for aviation demand at the Wasilla Airport, based on growth trends in population and aircraft registrations. Table 6 summarizes population estimates from DOLWD (2022b) and aircraft registrations with Wasilla and MSB (including Wasilla) addresses from FAA (2023).

Table 6. Historical Population and Aircraft Registrations by Address, 2007–2022

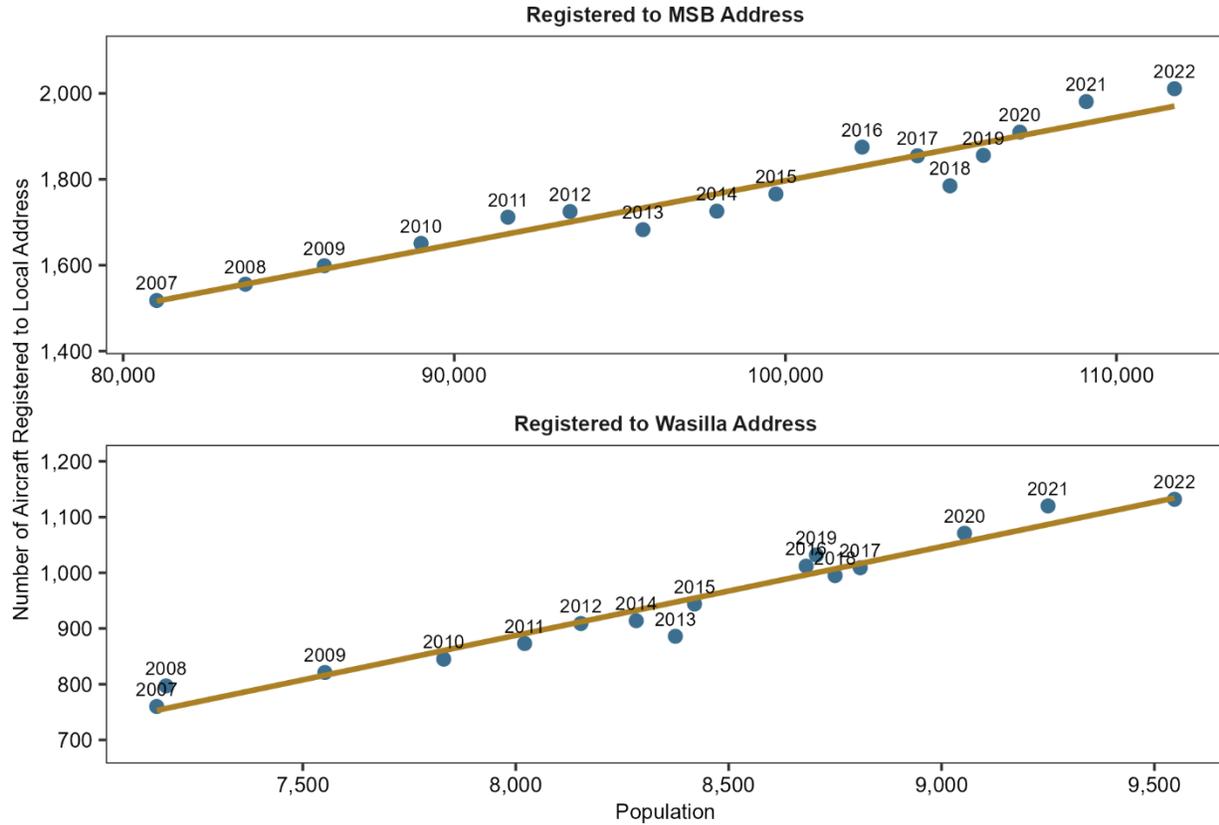
Year	Population		Number of Aircraft	
	Wasilla	MSB	Wasilla	MSB
2007	7,157	81,012	760	1,518
2008	7,179	83,691	797	1,556
2009	7,552	86,074	821	1,599
2010	7,831	88,995	845	1,651
2011	8,021	91,620	873	1,712
2012	8,153	93,496	909	1,725
2013	8,375	95,697	886	1,683
2014	8,283	97,930	914	1,726
2015	8,420	99,715	944	1,766
2016	8,682	102,317	1,012	1,875
2017	8,809	103,988	1,009	1,855
2018	8,750	104,971	995	1,785
2019	8,706	105,980	1,032	1,856
2020	9,054	107,081	1,071	1,910
2021	9,250	109,086	1,120	1,981
2022	9,547	111,752	1,132	2,011

Sources: DOLWD 2022b, FAA 2023

Aircraft registrations have grown with population over this period, with a close statistical relationship as shown in Figure 16. Despite sharing an upward trend, Wasilla has seen higher growth in registrations on a per capita basis. In 2007, MSB had 53.4 people for each aircraft, and that grew to 55.6 by 2022. In Wasilla, however, the number of people per aircraft dropped from

9.4 in 2007 to 8.4 in 2022. In other words, per capita aircraft ownership (based on registration address) has been growing steadily in Wasilla while it has been declining for MSB as a whole.

Figure 16. Comparison of Number of Locally Registered Aircraft to Population, 2007–2022, by Address



Sources: DOLWD 2022b, FAA 2023

Table 7 presents annualized growth rates for population and aircraft registrations with addresses in Wasilla and MSB. From 2007 to 2022, Wasilla experienced slightly lower population growth (1.94 percent annually) than MSB (2.17 percent), but a higher growth in aircraft registrations (2.69 percent) than MSB (1.89 percent). Looking forward from 2022 to 2050, DOLWD (2022c) expects annualized growth of 1.00 percent for MSB. Northern Economics’ forecast for Wasilla is for slightly higher growth over this period (1.15 percent). Using the data shown in Table 6 and Figure 16, Northern Economics projects aircraft registration growth in Wasilla to be 1.48 percent annually through 2050, compared to only 0.85 percent in MSB.

Table 7. Annualized Historical and Projected Population and Aircraft Registration Growth Rates, 2022–2050

Location	Annualized Growth of Population (Percent)		Annualized Growth of Aircraft Registrations (Percent)	
	Historical	Projected	Historical	Projected
Wasilla	1.94	1.15	2.69	1.48
MSB	2.17	1.00	1.89	0.85

Sources: DOLWD 2022b, DOWLD 2022c, FAA 2023, and Northern Economics analysis

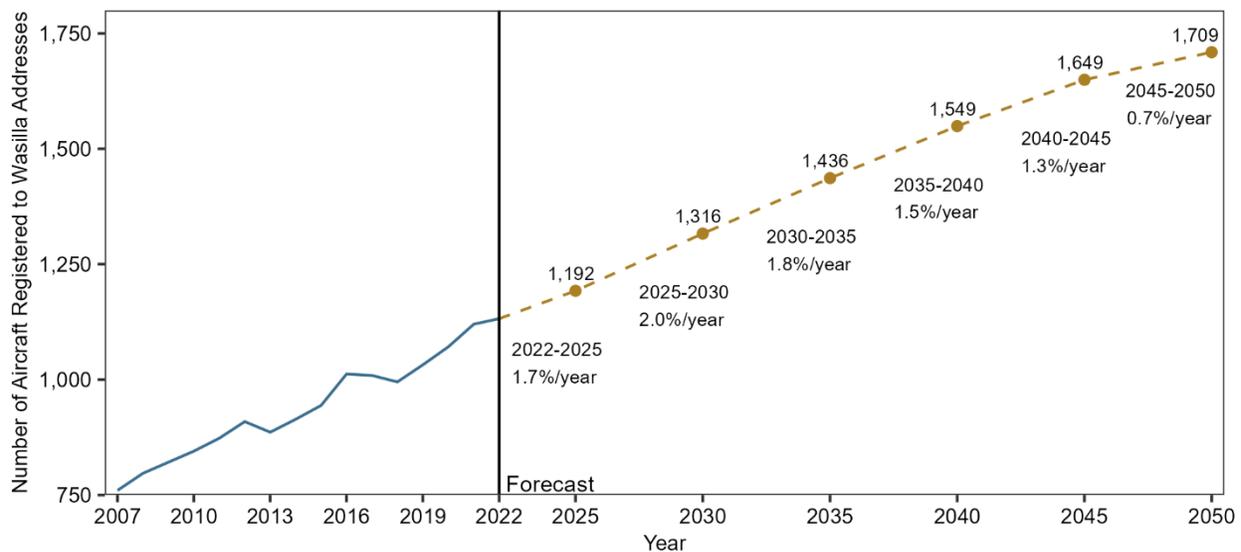
Based on these results, the analysis recommends the growth rates shown in Table 8 be used for forecasting aviation demand at the Wasilla Airport.

Table 8. Aviation Growth Rate Scenarios, 2022-2050

Growth Scenario	Annualized Growth Rate (Percent)	Basis for Growth Rate
Low	1.15	Northern Economics' population projections for the City of Wasilla
Base	1.48	Linear regression of Wasilla aircraft as a function of population applied to Northern Economics' population projections for the City of Wasilla
High	1.89	Linear regression of MSB aircraft as a function of population applied to DOLWD's (2022c) population projections for the MSB

Figure 17 presents the base case projection for the number of aircraft registered to Wasilla addresses and growth in demand for the Wasilla Airport. While the overall annualized growth rate is projected to be 1.48 percent, the figure shows growth rates for each period (2022 to 2025 and then every 5 years thereafter).

Figure 17. Base Case Aviation Ownership and Demand Growth for Wasilla Airport, 2022–2050



Sources: DOLWD 2022b, DOWLD 2022c, FAA 2023, and Northern Economics analysis

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