

Sitka Community Indicators



A Profile of
Community
Well-Being

2002

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A Profile of Community Well-Being

"The indicators a community chooses to report to itself about itself are surprisingly powerful. They reflect collective values and inform collective decisions. The idea of citizens choosing their own indicators is something new under the sun—something intensely democratic."
—Donnella Meadows

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This report is also available online at: www.cityofsitka.com.

Cover photo by Reber Stein.

About Sitka Community Indicators

Welcome to Sitka Community Indicators 2002. This is a sequel to the first indicators report that was published in 1999 and co-sponsored by the Island Institute and Sitka's Turning Point partnership. The first report offered a broad profile and assessment of the well-being of Sitka. It provided information on population characteristics, the economy, social and health concerns, environmental issues, schools, and crime—all things that affect the quality of life in Sitka. It was widely distributed throughout the community and was found by many to be informative and useful—and the collaborative process that produced it was itself a positive civic development. Turning Point is pleased to be able to offer this updated and more inclusive indicators report to the community.

This community effort is in keeping with a grass roots movement taking place around the country in neighborhoods, urban centers, suburbs, and small rural towns. People who share common concerns about maintaining or improving the quality of life in their community for future generations are finding indicators to offer the tools they need to help measure progress toward a healthy and sustainable community.

What are indicators? They help us measure something which is not directly measurable. For example, we cannot measure the weather. Instead we measure indicators of weather, e.g. temperature, pressure, rainfall. The same is true for the economy. We can't measure it directly, but can get a sense of how the economy is doing by looking at such things as the unemployment rate, average income, or job trends. Likewise, we can get a sense of community health by tracking physical, social, and environmental indicators—such things as causes of death, crime rates, or waste generation.

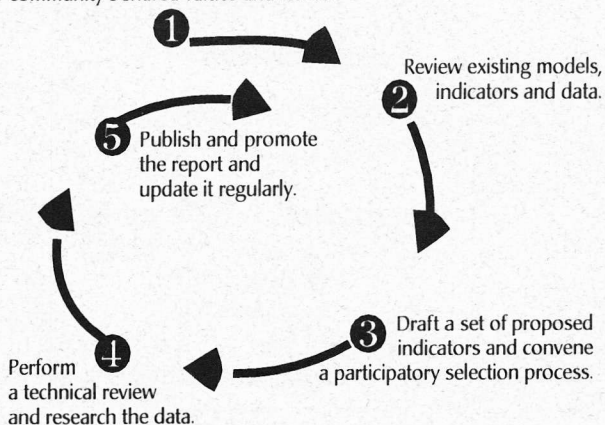
The Community Indicators Handbook¹ describes indicators as "instrument panels that provide citizens with clear and honest information about past trends and current realities, and assist them in steering their communities on their desired course. They help civic leaders clarify key issues and challenges, or prioritize spending when budgets are tight. Indicators can point a community toward specific initiatives or policy changes that will have a real effect on quality of life. Community indicators don't just monitor progress; they help make it happen."

The Handbook also notes that the process of developing indicators is as important as the indicators themselves. "Good indicators are developed by a broad spectrum of community members. By convening citizens to consider how to measure their overall well-being, the community as a whole is spurred to create new visions of the future, develop new working relationships across old boundaries, and define its assets, problems, and opportunities in new ways." The diagram here illustrates the steps of the process and how it can be perpetuated to become an ongoing measure of community vitality. This model was used to develop Sitka Community Indicators.

We were beginners when we prepared the first indicators report. Since then, we've learned a lot about identifying good indicators and also about how difficult it can be to gather and present information in an interesting way without distortion or bias. We still have plenty to learn about how to choose good measures for the long haul, how to describe and assess them, and how to present them effectively so they get the attention they deserve. Additional perspectives on this are most welcome. As long as we have strong community engagement with this work, it's our intention to continue publication of indicators reports every two years so Sitkans will be able to understand their community more thoroughly—its strengths and its weaknesses and the ways we might work together to ensure its vitality into the future.

Process of Developing Community Indicators

Form a working group, clarify its purpose and identify your community's shared values and vision.



¹ Redefining Progress, 1997

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Demographics

Recent Population Numbers Show Sitka Population Stabilizing

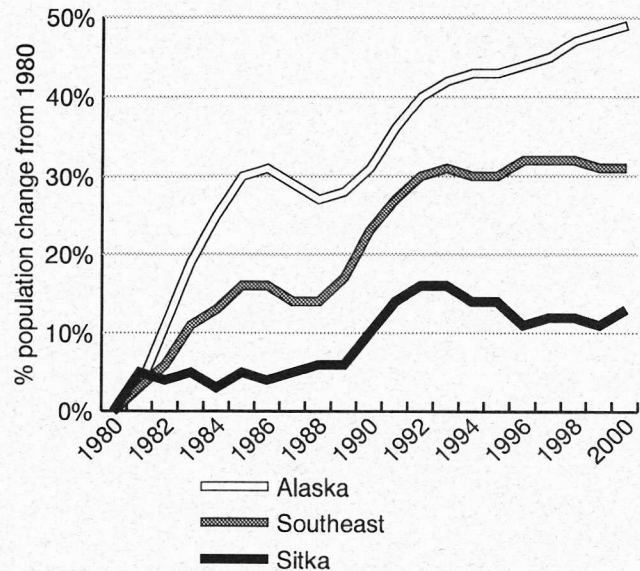
How are we doing?

Sitka's population has grown 13% in the 20 year period since 1980. Sitka's rate of growth has been outpaced by the Southeast region, which has increased by nearly one-third over 20 years, and by the State of Alaska, whose population has nearly doubled since 1980. Census 2000 population numbers: Sitka - 8,835, Southeast - 73,082, and Anchorage - 626,932.

Why is this important?

Population change can respond to and contribute to fluctuations in the economy, changes in the character of a community, and pressures upon social and natural resources. Municipal government, private businesses, schools, and medical services are all affected by shifts in population, as are the infrastructure of the community and the tax rates.

Population Trend Since 1980



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau & AK Department of Labor

Sitka's Birth Rate Continues to Decline

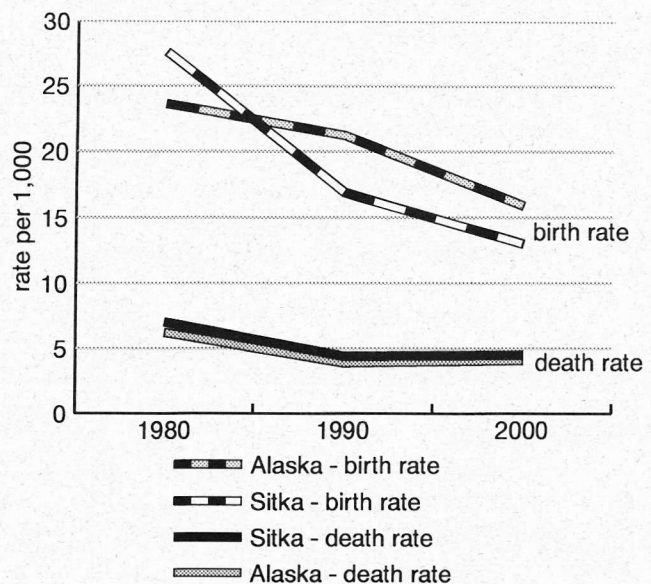
How are we doing?

After a steep decline in Sitka's birth rate during the years 1980-1990, the decrease in birth rate eased slightly during the years 1990-2000. This decline resulted in a birth rate in 2000 that was half of what it was in 1980. During the same period, the state witnessed a decrease of one-third. The death rate has decreased slightly in Sitka and closely follows the trend for the rest of the state.

Why is this important?

Although births are only one way in which a community sustains its population, a change in birth rate can signal a significant shift in personal priorities and social needs. Lower birth rates can suggest a diminished need for services to children, such as education, recreation and health care. A decline in overall death rates suggests a general improvement in health and health care. A decline in both birth and death rates suggests an aging population, a trend observed in all industrialized nations.

Age-Adjusted Birth and Death Rates



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

Elder Population Continues to Increase

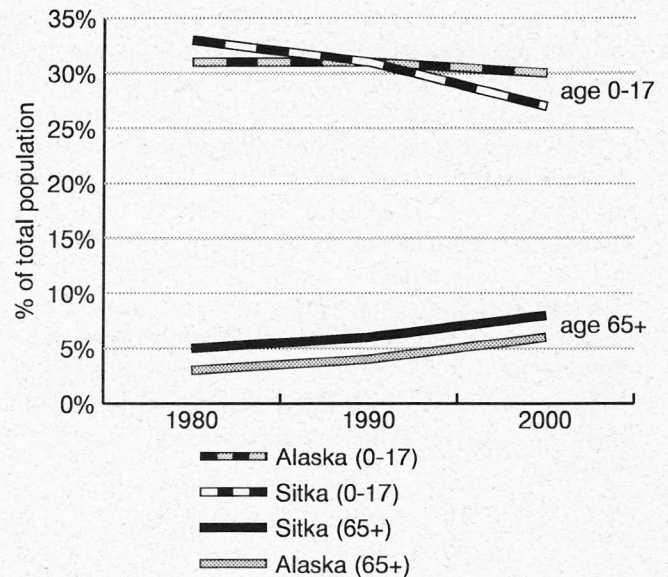
How are we doing?

In 2000, the percentage of persons 65 years and older was 6% in Alaska and 8% in Sitka. The number of persons younger than 18 years of age in Sitka has decreased from 33% to 27% over a 20 year period ending in 2000. The median age is rising in both Sitka and the rest of the state. The median age in Sitka has risen 9 years over a 20 year period, from 26.4 in 1980 to 35.2 in 2000. During the same period the median age for Alaska has risen 6 years, from 26.1 in 1980 to 32.4 in 2000.

Why is this important?

A continued trend of a diminishing younger population and a growing elder population forecasts changes in the variety and distribution of social services and economic activity in the community. New priorities for community resources may result from evolving needs of a changing populace.

Population Trend by Age



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau & AK Department of Labor

Distribution of Sitka's Population Shifting

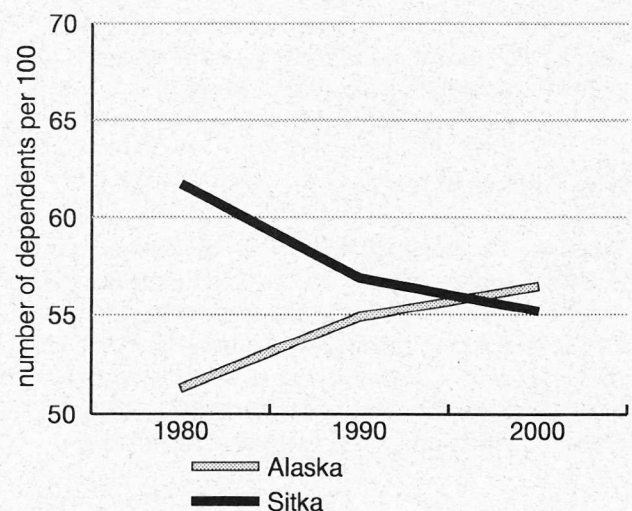
How are we doing?

The number of dependents (0-17 plus 65 and over) divided by the number of workforce age persons (18-64) results in the dependency ratio, shown in the number of dependents per 100 people. In the 20 years prior to 2000, the dependency ratio in Sitka has dropped from 63 to 55, meaning that Sitka currently has approximately two workforce age persons for every dependent age person. Alaska's dependency ratio has risen in the last 20 years to 56, close to Sitka's current ratio of 55.

Why is this important?

The numerical relationship between people of workforce age and their dependents is a measure of a community's capacity to meet conventional social needs. Sitka now has more capacity, according to this measure.

Dependency Ratio



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau & AK Department of Labor

Demographics

Sitka's Racial/Ethnic Mix Remains Diverse

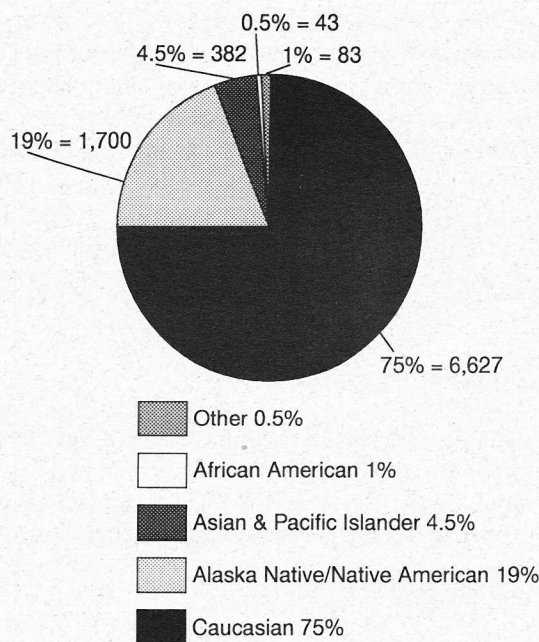
How are we doing?

Sitka's racial/ethnic makeup has changed little over the last two decades according to the Census Bureau. 3.3% of the total Sitka population claim a Hispanic or Latino origin in addition to their primary race. The number of Sitka residents registered as tribal citizens was not available from Sitka Tribe of Alaska.

Why is this important?

Cultural diversity is a strong point of any community. Sitka's unusual mix of cultural traditions and history, both Native and non-Native, enriches the quality of life and appeals to visitors. Cultural diversity also presents challenges and increases the need for cultural understanding.

Sitka Population by Race in 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Voter Participation Remains at Half

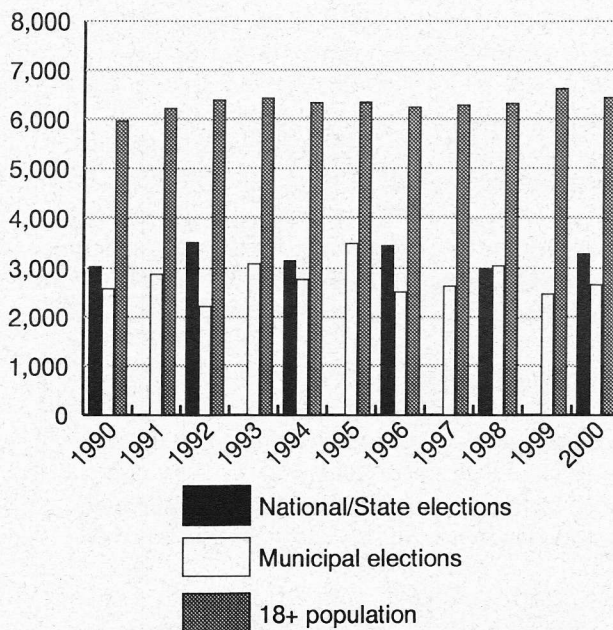
How are we doing?

In the 2000 election cycle, half of the local eligible voters cast a ballot in the State/National elections and only 41% voted in the municipal election. This trend has been relatively stable over the last 10 years.

Why is this important?

Voter participation signals citizens' involvement and investment in the development, implementation and approval of public policies. The voter helps to ensure that representatives and other public servants respond to the needs and concerns of the constituency. Voter participation is fundamental to democratic principles and a representative democracy.

Voter Participation



Sources: City and Borough of Sitka & AK Division of Elections

Sitka's Unemployment Rate Low

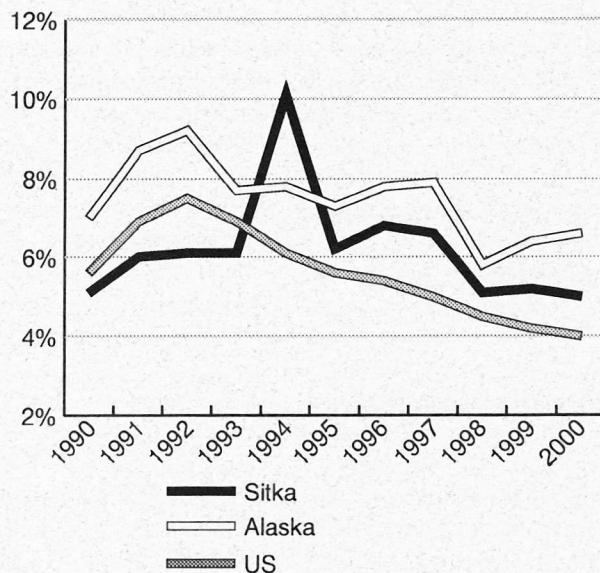
How are we doing?

In 2000, Sitka's unemployment rate dropped to 5%, just slightly lower than it was in 1990. Over the past 10 years, unemployment in Sitka has been lower than the statewide average, with the exception of the year immediately following the APC mill closure. The rate for a given year does not reflect fluctuations within that year. Sitka's rates tend to go up in the winter and down in the summer because of the seasonal nature of some of Sitka's leading industries.

Why is this important?

The unemployment rate reflects the number of people looking for work but not finding it. It does not include those whose unemployment benefits have run out. Unemployment rates are one indicator of the overall economic health of a community, and Sitka's diverse economy has helped keep those rates fairly low.

Unemployment Rate



Source: Alaska Department of Labor

Services is Sitka's Largest Employment Sector

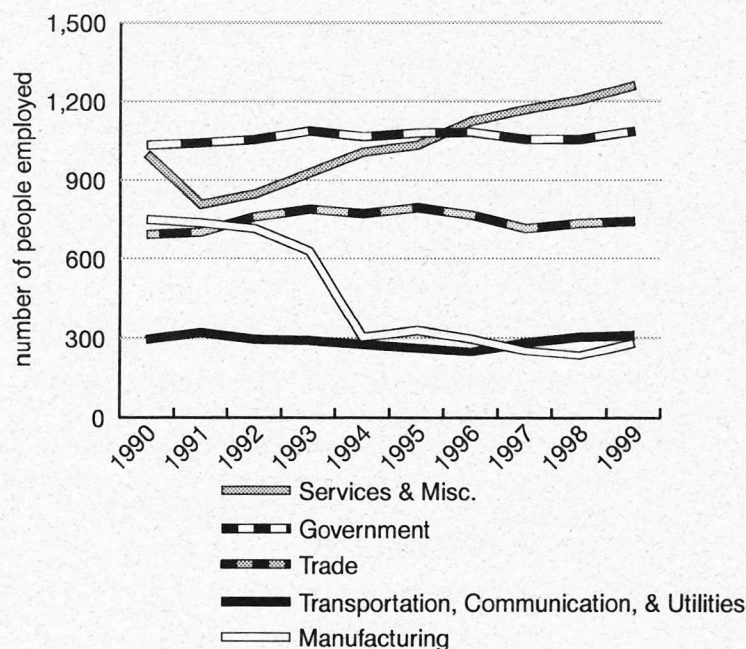
How are we doing?

Sitka has witnessed a steady increase in its services sector from 806 employees in 1991 to 1,259 in 1999. The leaders in the services sector in 1999 were: health services 36%, social services 16%, membership organizations 12%, hotels 11%, and education 8%. Manufacturing jobs have declined by 62% since the APC mill closure, but manufacturing still remains among the leading employment sectors because it includes seafood processing. Commercial fishing jobs, however, are not reflected in the Department of Labor statistics because most fishermen and deckhands are self-employed.

Why is this important?

Diversity strengthens Sitka's economy for times when any sectors of the economy weaken. Sitka's diversity proved to be a strength in the years following the APC mill closure. The rise in Sitka's services sector at a time of decline in manufacturing is not a shift unique to Sitka, but parallels national trends of recent years.

Sitka's Leading Employment Sectors



Source: Alaska Department of Labor

Commercial Fishing in Sitka Faces Challenges

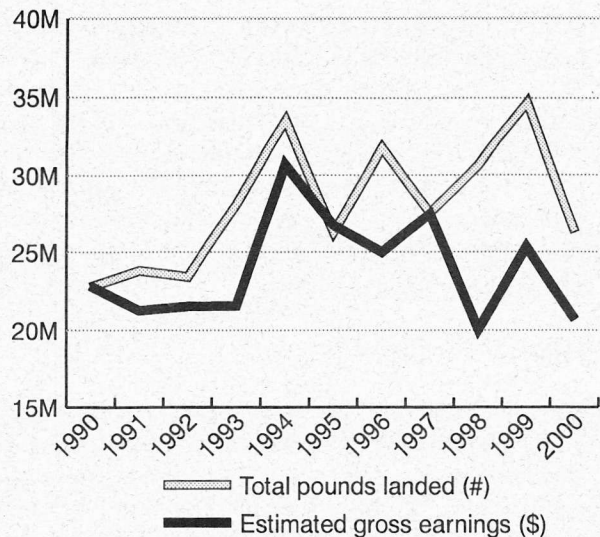
How are we doing?

Sitka fishers' incomes vary each year depending on market prices and abundance of respective species. The graph reflects totals for all commercial fisheries combined. Salmon fisheries make up the largest percentage of these combined harvests. Both the number of permits fished and the number of people fishing their permits have dropped over the last decade from 521 people fishing 1,016 permits in 1990 to 444 people fishing 832 permits in 2000. (These numbers do not include crew members.) Many fishers hold more than one permit and take part in different fisheries.

Why is this important?

Commercial fishing continues to be one of the economic mainstays of Sitka. While biological cycles and environmental factors affect annual fish stocks, fisheries management has kept most stocks strong. The livelihoods of Sitka fishers will likely parallel the strength of global markets and will be specifically affected by the dominance of farmed fish.

Commercial Fishing in Sitka



Source: Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

Sitka's Per Capita Income Growing

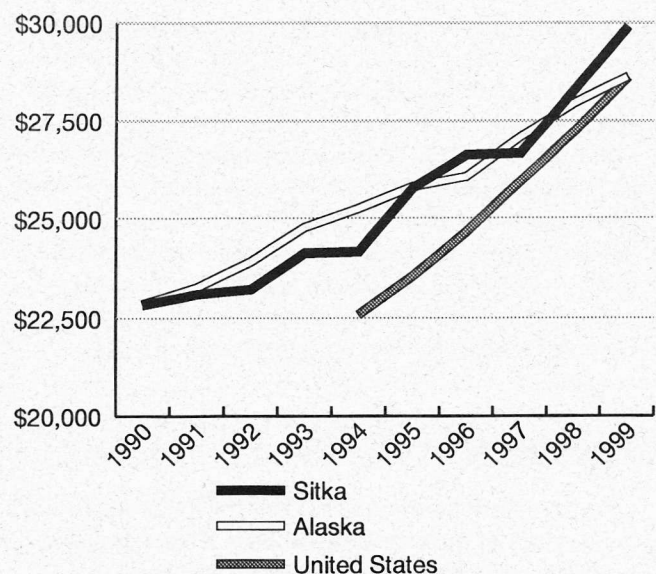
How are we doing?

In 1999, Sitkans' per capita annual incomes averaged \$1,200 more than that of Alaskans and Americans overall. The national per capita income has caught up to Alaska's per capita income, mostly because of lower wage growth in Alaska. Sitka's per capita income has gained strength after the wage slump associated with the APC mill closure.

Why is this important?

Per capita income is used as an economic tool and does not represent actual individual income. Per capita income is the total personal income divided by the number of residents. Total personal income includes earnings (e.g. wages and salaries, business income), dividends, interest, rental income, and transfer payments (such as social security).

Per Capita Income



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Cruise Ship Visitors Important Element in Local Economy

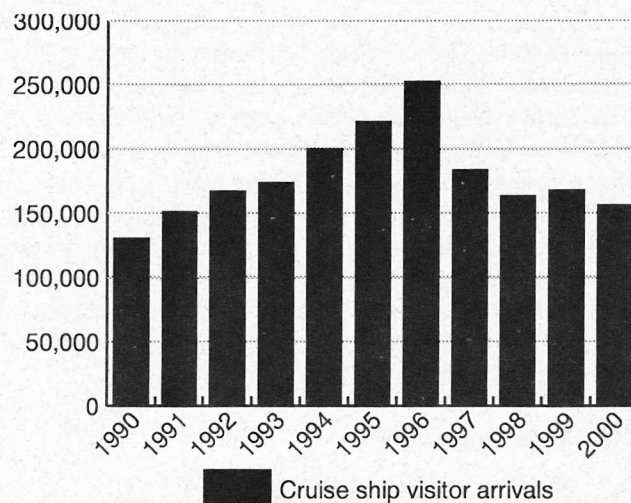
How are we doing?

Following a rise and fall in cruise ship activity, the number of cruise ship visitors in 2000 amounted to nearly the same number as in 1991. Though cruise ship numbers have generally declined since their peak in 1996, other aspects of the visitor industry have helped reduce that impact. Convention activity in Sitka has doubled since 1993. Conventioneers contributed more than an estimated \$3 million to the local economy in 2000.

Why is this important?

Cruise ship tourism has become a vital part of the local economy, and yet it is not without its controversies. The small town character of Sitka is something highly valued by locals and visitors alike. Keeping that character while at the same time maintaining a strong visitor industry will require the careful thought and attention of both local citizens and industry representatives.

Cruise Ship Visitors to Sitka



Source: Sitka Convention & Visitors Bureau

Food and Heating Costs On the Rise

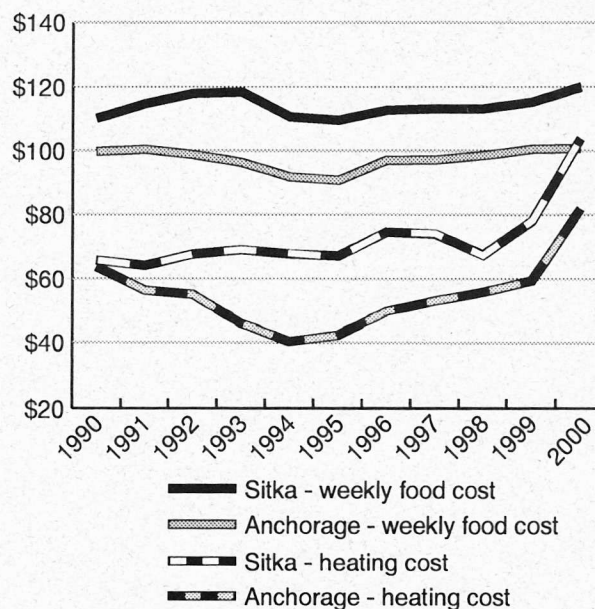
How are we doing?

In Sitka, weekly food costs have remained relatively stable over the last decade for a family of four. In 2000, the weekly food cost for a family of four was \$120 in Sitka, and \$101 in Anchorage, where costs have been consistently lower. A family's cost for heating their home with oil is similarly higher in Sitka than in Anchorage. The average cost of a 55 gallon tank of #1 heating oil in Sitka has risen 56% since 1990 and 28% in Anchorage during the same time period.

Why is this important?

Food is typically a family's second highest monthly expenditure following the cost of housing. The cost of food index is the price of a standardized basket of basic groceries, though it does not reflect all items at the grocery store. For Alaskan families, heating a home is an equally important expenditure. The recent rise in heating oil prices has meant that Sitkans have had to budget more for this essential cost of living.

Food and Heating Costs



Source: University of Alaska - Fairbanks,
Food Cost Survey 1990-2000

Public Assistance Claims Down Following Welfare to Work

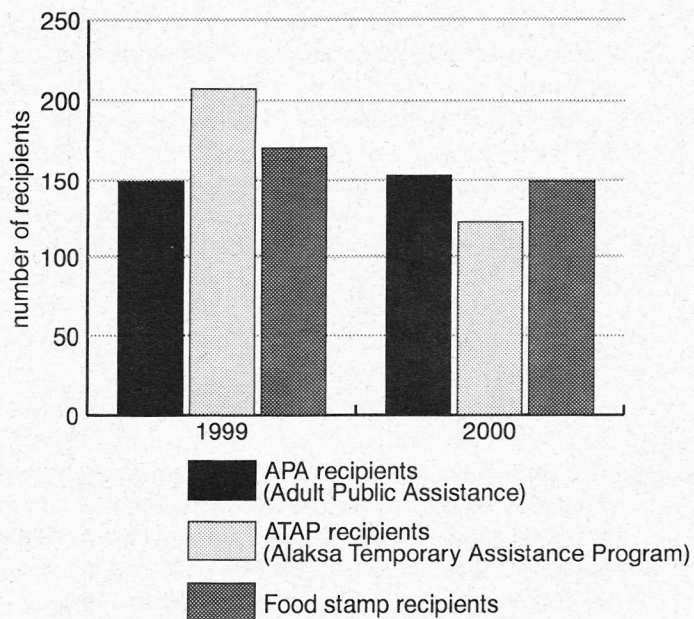
How are we doing?

Public assistance programs remain important for some Sitka families. These include Food Stamps, Heating Assistance, Adult Public Assistance, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance. Efforts to move families from welfare to work have resulted in a Temporary Assistance case load reduction of nearly 60%. Recipients with employment barriers, such as mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, learning disabilities, and family violence, represent a higher proportion of the case load than in the past. Tlingit & Haida Central Council has recently taken over welfare services for the Alaska Native population.

Why is this important?

The number of people receiving some form of public assistance is a measure of the extent to which Sitkans require help to meet basic needs. Strong partnerships between state and community agencies provide case management, child care, workforce development and other supportive services for these families and individuals.

Public Assistance in Sitka



Source: Alaska Division of Public Assistance

Steady Increase in Value of Homes Sold in Sitka

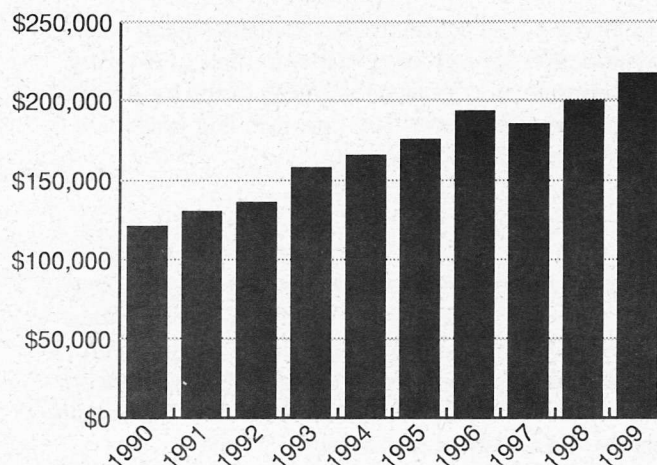
How are we doing?

The average cost of home ownership in Sitka has increased by \$100,000 in less than 10 years. Although the number of new dwellings increased by more than 500 units during the same period, the price of home ownership continues to climb. Most new houses being built are at the high end of the price range. The cost of a typical 3-bedroom 2-bath house is increasing at a lower rate, though fewer are being built.

Why is this important?

The rising cost of homes in Sitka means that low and moderate income households find it increasingly difficult to own a home.

**Average Value of Single Family Residence
Homes Sold in Sitka**



Source: Horan, Corak & Co.

Rents Remain Stable While Mortgages Increase

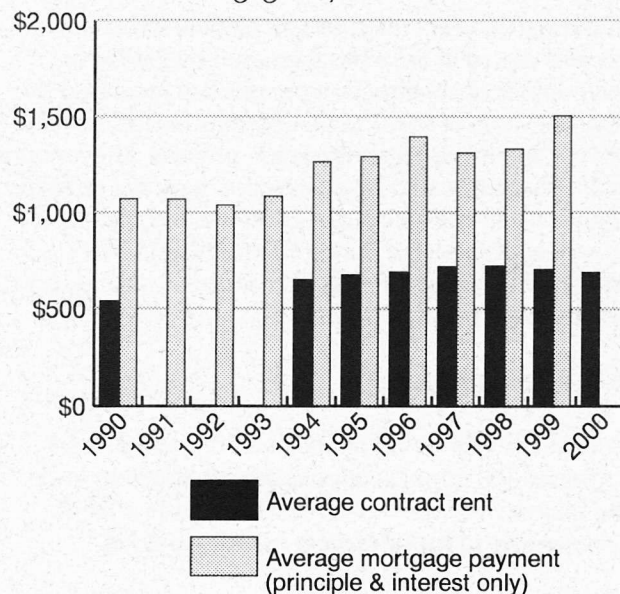
How are we doing?

The average cost of rent has stabilized over the past several years. The average cost of rent in Sitka for the year 2000 was \$689, in comparison with, \$838 in Juneau and \$702 in Anchorage. Although rents in Sitka are lower than in Juneau and Anchorage, they are still high in comparison with some cities in the lower 48 states. Monthly mortgage costs have increased by about \$400 in the last 10 years, as the average price of homes sold has increased.

Why is this important?

Rentals and home ownership offer shelter to Sitka's families and individuals. The availability of affordable housing greatly impacts low and moderate income families.

**Average Monthly Contract Rent and
Mortgage Payment in Sitka**



Source: Alaska Housing Finance Corp., Horan, Corak & Co., Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

Housing

586 New Dwelling Units since 1990

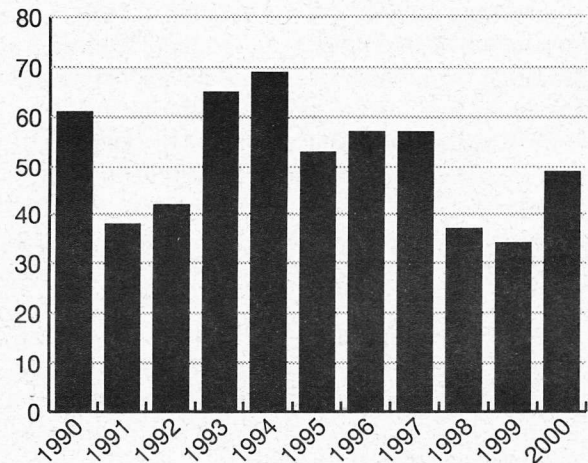
How are we doing?

The home construction market appears strong as Sitka continues to see increases in the number of dwelling units despite an overall stabilization of the local population. There have been 586 new dwelling units built in Sitka since 1990.

Why is this important?

Although there have been 586 new dwellings built in Sitka since 1990, it is unclear whether or not this has increased the availability of affordable housing. Affordable housing is an essential element of a healthy community that offers opportunities for shelter and home equity to a variety of households.

Dwelling Units Added in Sitka



Source: City & Borough of Sitka

Value of Construction Permits Rising in Sitka

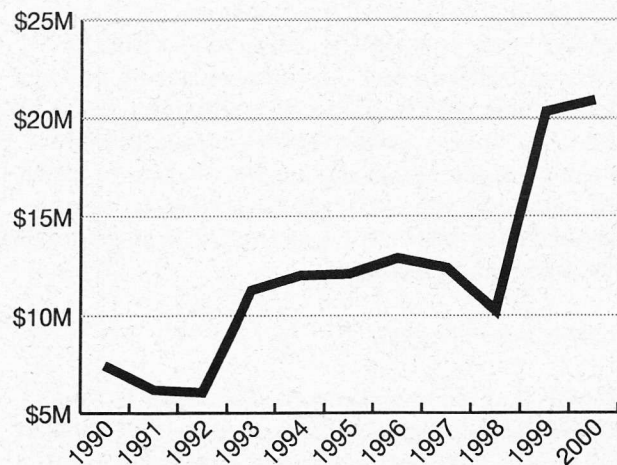
How are we doing?

In the last 10 years the total value of construction permits issued in Sitka has increased by 250% and the number of construction permits has increased by 8%. The value of construction permits issued includes private and business construction projects. The amount in 1999 was boosted by a \$9 million remodel of Sitka High School. The amount in 2000 was boosted by a \$4 million remodel of Baranof Elementary School, a \$1 million addition to the Alaska Troopers Academy, and several large private projects.

Why is this important?

Despite the high value of construction permits and increased job opportunities in the construction trade, the majority of these construction projects are not contributing to the affordable housing market.

Value of Construction Permits Issued in Sitka



Source: City & Borough of Sitka

Municipal Solid Waste Exceeds Local Capacity

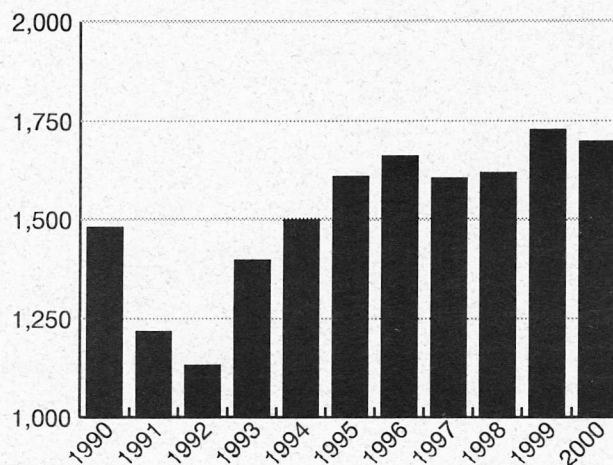
How are we doing?

Per capita waste generation rose steadily from 1992 to 1999, a period that also saw the failure of the city's incinerator and the city landfills nearing capacity. In 2000, 7,500 tons of municipal waste were shipped to a landfill in eastern Washington. Other waste streams, including building debris and biosolids, were handled at local landfills. Approximately 60 million gallons of landfill contaminated water had to be handled by the City's wastewater treatment plant. Two recent garbage rate hikes were necessary to cover the costs of handling Sitka's wastes.

Why is this important?

Sitka faces particular problems in handling its wastes because of geographical limitations, climate, and geological conditions. Citizen health and safety concerns are also important factors. Options for reducing, reusing, and recycling wastes are becoming more critical for Sitka residents.

Municipal Solid Waste Pounds Per Capita



Source: City & Borough of Sitka

Sitkans Rely on Vehicles for Primary Transportation

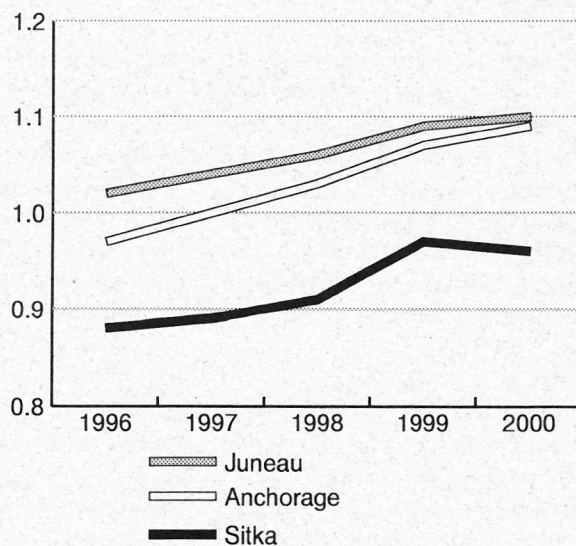
How are we doing?

Although Sitka has fewer registered vehicles per capita than Juneau or Anchorage, there are almost as many registered vehicles in Sitka as there are individual people. Between 1996 and 2000, Sitka's population increased by 185 people, while the number of registered vehicles increased by 802 for a total of 8,466 registered business and personal vehicles in 2000. These vehicles are used by the 75% of Sitkans who are of driving age. There are 49 total miles of road available for Sitkans to drive on. The number of registered vehicles in 2000 amounted to 172 vehicles per mile of road.

Why is this important?

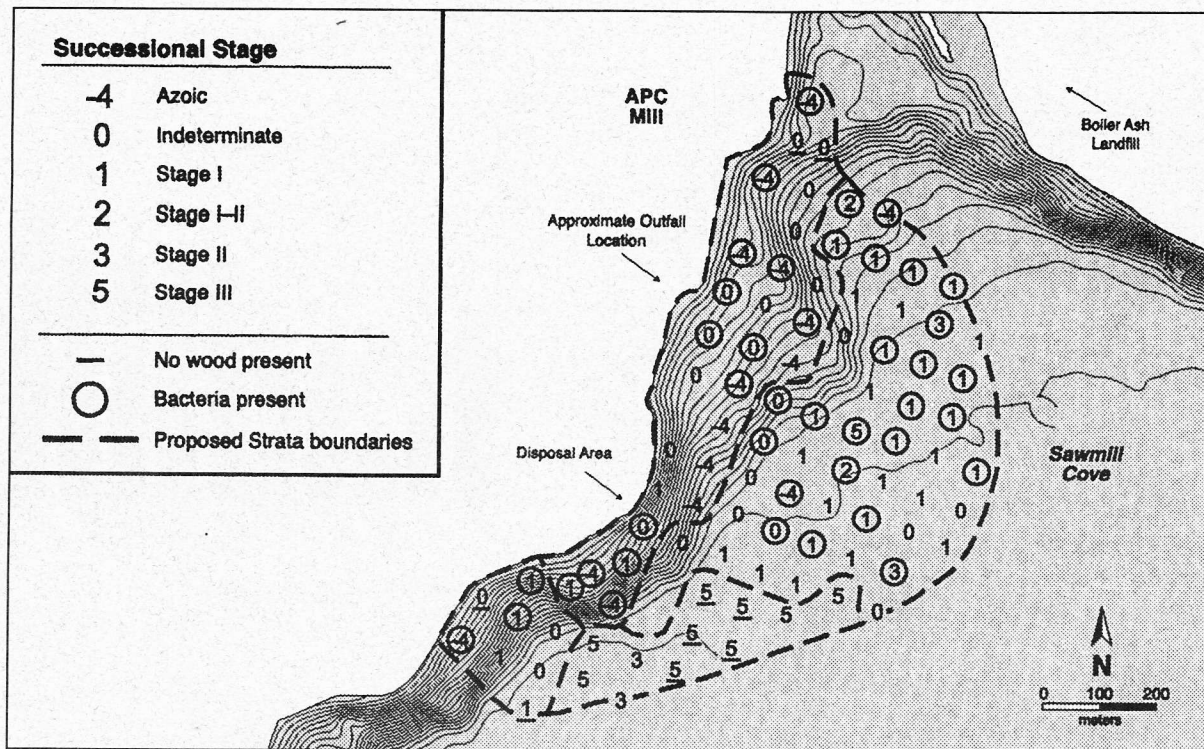
Sitkans rely on vehicles for their primary transportation. Climate, availability of public transportation, and patterns of development may be factors affecting people's driving habits. Some people chose alternatives to individual vehicle use, such as car pooling, organized transportation, walking, and bike riding.

Registered Vehicles Per Capita



Source: Department of Motor Vehicles

Biological Recovery of Former Pulp Mill Site



This map reprinted with permission by the City and Borough of Sitka.

Note: Stages of recovery are defined as follows: stage 1 is the presence of numerous tiny tube dwelling marine polychaetes, 2 is the transition to larger burrowing creatures that rework the sediment and introduce oxygen, and 3 is a mature colony of these sediment dwellers, reflecting healthy sediment conditions. An index of ecosystem recovery is defined, based on chemistry and organisms present, ranging from -4 to 5, the latter being closest to an unpolluted natural ecosystem.

How are we doing?

Results of recent monitoring show that organisms are beginning to recolonize areas contaminated by pulp waste. The extent of recolonization and type of organism depends on proximity to the mill site and the depth of waste sediment. Azoic areas are places where the sediment does not have oxygen and may contain toxic gases. These locations, which lie closest to the shoreline of the mill, are the least healthy and most difficult to recolonize. When docks are reconstructed or other shoreline disturbance occurs, it will be important to minimize sediment disturbance and to monitor for gas release. Although the first recovery management milestone for the most affected area has been achieved, 62% of the area is still considered seriously impaired. However, researchers are encouraged by the extent of recovery that has already occurred and by observations of fish and other organisms in much of the area.

Why is this important?

Once considered an EPA "Superfund" site, the former APC mill site is the most acutely polluted location in Sitka. Monitoring the recovery of Silver Bay is critical to insure that pollutants are not spreading into other areas and that recovery is taking place. Operation of the pulp mill contaminated Silver Bay with pulp process liquid waste, surface water runoff, stack emissions, wood debris and log storage. Chemicals of concern include dioxin, ammonia, benzoic acid, resin acids, cadmium, nickel and 4-methylphenol. The chemicals occur in decomposition of the wood waste covering the bottom. During site clean-up studies, no significant levels of toxicity were found outside Silver Bay. Close to the mill, where wood waste deposits were thickest, levels of dioxin and other chemicals were sufficient to damage sensitive life stages of bottom-dwelling creatures. Toxins were not estimated to be present in levels high enough to harm humans. A healthy bottom-dwelling community is vital to the integrity of this important marine environment.

Local Forest Service Cabin Registrations Climb

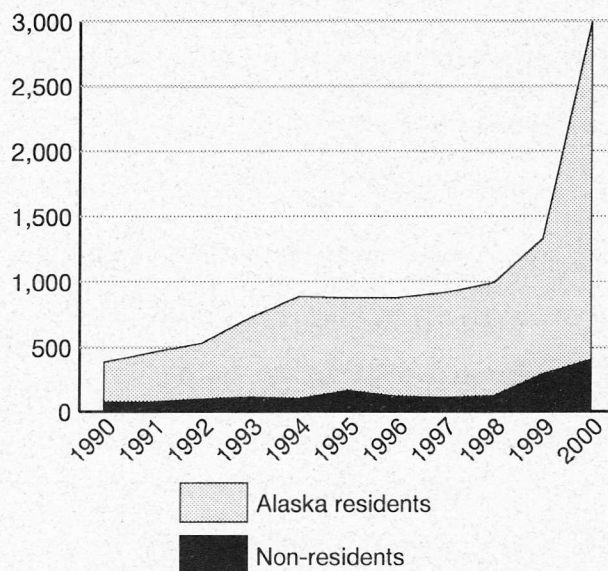
How are we doing?

In the last ten years the number of registered users visiting USDA Forest Service cabins in the Sitka Ranger District has increased tenfold. The Forest Service reports that Alaskan residents visited area cabins 3,000 times in 2000, up from 314 times in 1990. Non-residents registered for 407 visits in 2000, up from 72 visits in 1990. Robust interest by registered users reflects a steady expansion of available cabins from 14 in 1990 to 23 in 1994 and 24 in 1998. The significant increase in registered use after 1998 suggests overwhelming approval of a new internet registration process with an option for credit card payment.

Why is this important?

USDA Forest Service cabins are a regional asset and a source of community pride. Although not all visits to area cabins are registered, official activity illustrates the value and benefit of this federal program to hunters, hikers, boaters, campers and those who feel a cabin is a destination in itself.

Forest Service Cabin Registered Users



Source: U.S. Forest Service

Sitka National Historical Park Popular Site for Sitkans

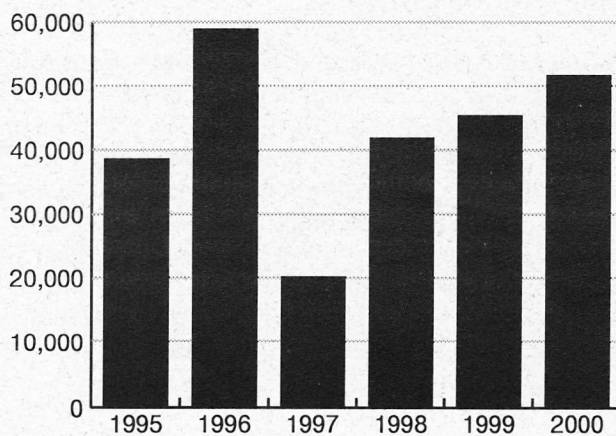
How are we doing?

The off-season trail activity at the Sitka National Historical Park grew to more than 50,000 visits in 2000. After a historical high in 1996, the park logged increases of 5,000 visits per year during the months September through May. Steady increases in trail use at the park for 3 years suggest that outdoor walking opportunities near town appeal to locals. The decline of trail use in 1997 may be explained by actual and perceived criminal activity in and near the park which diminished its popularity for a short time.

Why is this important?

The Sitka National Historical Park offers a distinctive blend of history, culture and atmosphere which dates back almost a century. The popularity of this site and its many features is a commentary on its mission and the manner in which it serves both visitors and locals with an enduring experience in and out of doors.

Off-Season SNHP Trail Use



Source: Sitka National Historic Park

Note: The months January-May and September-December were used in an attempt to illustrate local usage.

Education

Sitka School District Enrollment Declines

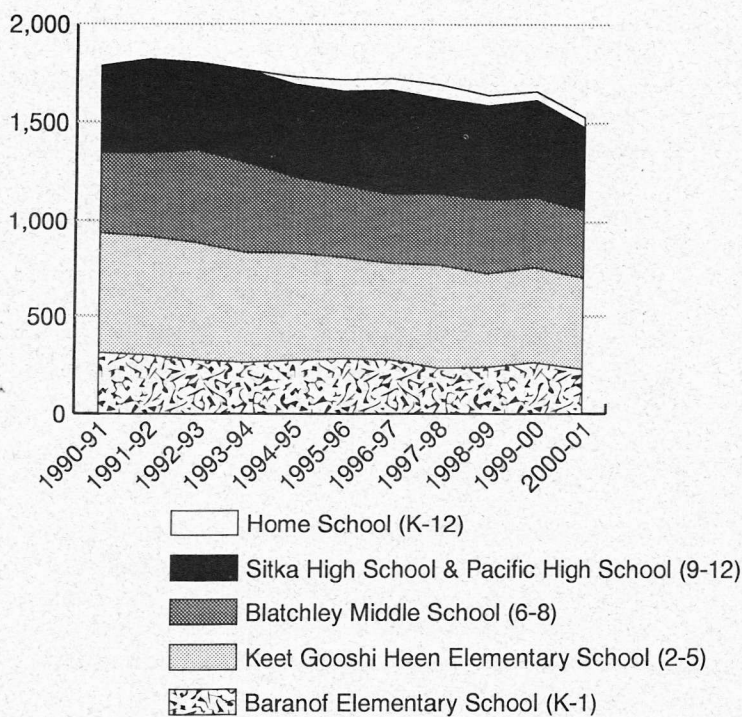
How are we doing?

The number of students attending Sitka schools has dropped by 15% since 1990. In the same time period the 0-17 population dropped by 9%. The figures here do not include non-district home school/correspondence enrollment.

Why is this important?

Lower enrollment impacts the public school budget and the size of Sitka's workforce in future years. Drops in school enrollment typically reflect demographic changes and changes in the birth rate which may be reflective of an aging population and changes in the community's employment opportunities.

Sitka School District Enrollment



Source: Sitka School District

High School Students Take Advantage of Options

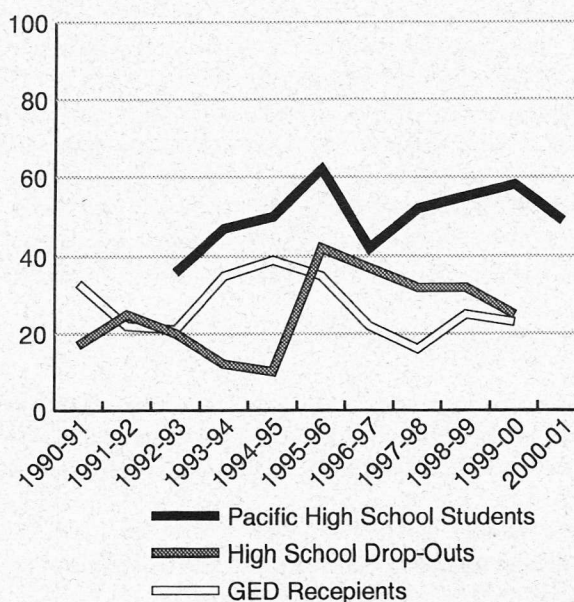
How are we doing?

Sitka's high school students have several options for earning a diploma: Sitka High School, Pacific High School (an alternative high school), REACH (a home school correspondence program), and the GED. Pacific High School accommodates approximately 50 students per year, while 16-25 students have taken advantage of the GED in the last four years, down from a high of 39 in 1995. The dropout rate is down to 25 from a high of 42 in 1995-1996, which was the first year dropouts from Pacific High School were included in the count.

Why is this important?

A high school diploma is considered a necessary credential for entering the job market or continuing one's education. Behind the credential are the educational attainment and skills needed to begin a productive adult life. Educational attainment leads to better job opportunities, higher income, and greater productivity.

High School Options



Sources: Sitka School District & University of Alaska Southeast-Sitka

Sitka High School Graduation Exam Scores Improve

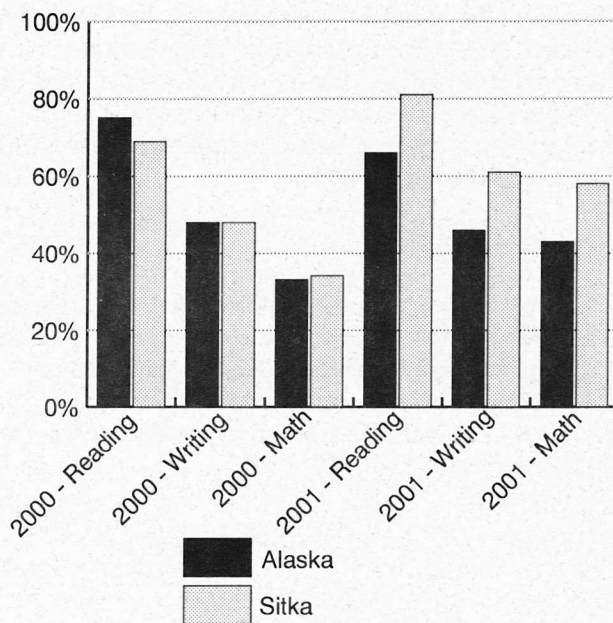
How are we doing?

In the spring of 2000, the State of Alaska began administering high stakes graduation tests to all sophomores within the state. Results for the Sitka School District that year indicate a performance at or near the state averages. In 2001, Sitka High School tenth graders outperformed the state average by 14%. In addition to demographics, factors affecting the scores are the physical environment for testing, attitudes toward testing, students' test taking skills, alignment of the curriculum with test content, and the quality of the instructional program.

Why is this important?

All students graduating in 2004 and beyond will be required to pass the HSGQE (High School Graduation Qualifying Exam) in order to receive a diploma. Certain jobs will be closed to those not obtaining a diploma. The quality of both the educational system and its graduates impacts the entire community.

10th Grade Students Passing HSGQE Test



Source: Sitka School District

Post-Secondary Options Serve Wide Spectrum of Students

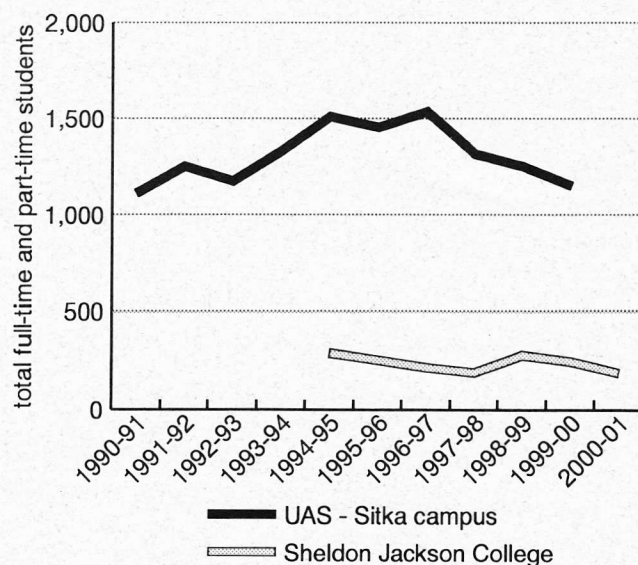
How are we doing?

The number of post-secondary students enrolled at UAS-Sitka is at a level about equal to a decade ago. A three-year increase of about 25% was experienced immediately after the closure of the pulp mill. Most of the students enrolled at UAS-Sitka are part-time and represent the typical "community college" population. Sheldon Jackson College's residential campus attracts an enrollment that is predominantly full-time students seeking BA and BS degrees.

Why is this important?

Access to a variety of lower division, general education courses, bachelor programs and vocational training is critical to the well-being of a healthy community. The post-secondary institutions in Sitka have the capacity and resources to meet these needs and to respond to specific industry workforce needs.

Post-Secondary Education Enrollment



Sources: University of Alaska Southeast - Sitka & Sheldon Jackson College

Education

Public Library Use High in Sitka

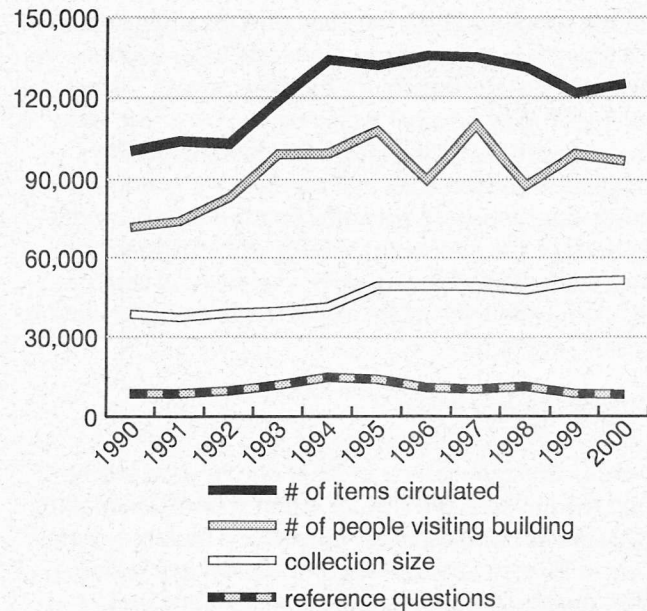
How are we doing?

Since 1990 the number of citizens using the library, the collection size, and the number of items circulated have increased substantially. The number of visitors grew by 35%, the collection size grew by 24%, and the items circulated grew by 33%. Reference questions have held steady over the last 10 years.

Why is this important?

Library usage in a community reflects the value citizens place on life long learning and civic involvement. Those who regularly visit the library become advocates for the services their library offers and, in the case of young children, become avid readers and life long library users.

Kettleson Memorial Library



Sources: Kettleson Memorial Library

Sitka's Increase in Medicaid Eligibles Parallels State

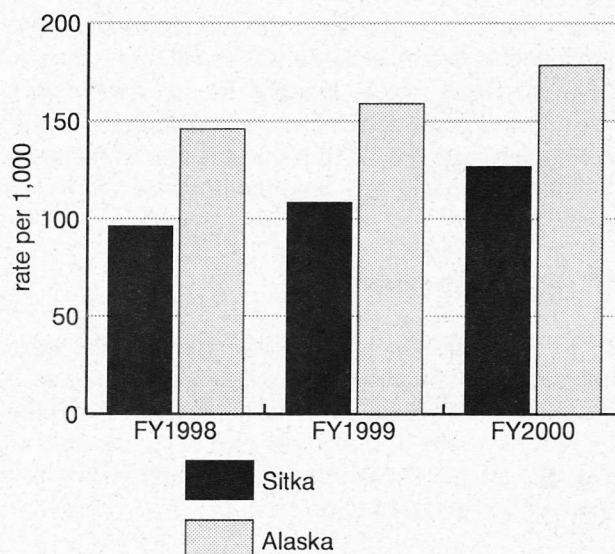
How are we doing?

There has been a steady rise in the number of Alaskans and Sitkans who are eligible for medical assistance. The increased numbers are due in part to the newly expanded medical insurance program called Denali Kid Care. Some families may not qualify for Medicaid under the federal poverty guidelines of the traditional Medicaid system but are nonetheless lower income families and may not have adequate insurance or are unable to pay for insurance.

Why is this important?

This indicator relates to the number of people in the community who require help to meet a basic need. Access to health insurance is an important part of ensuring young Sitkans receive the necessary medical care to grow up healthy.

Medicaid Eligibles



Source: Alaska Division of Public Assistance

Heart Disease and Cancer Leading Causes of Death

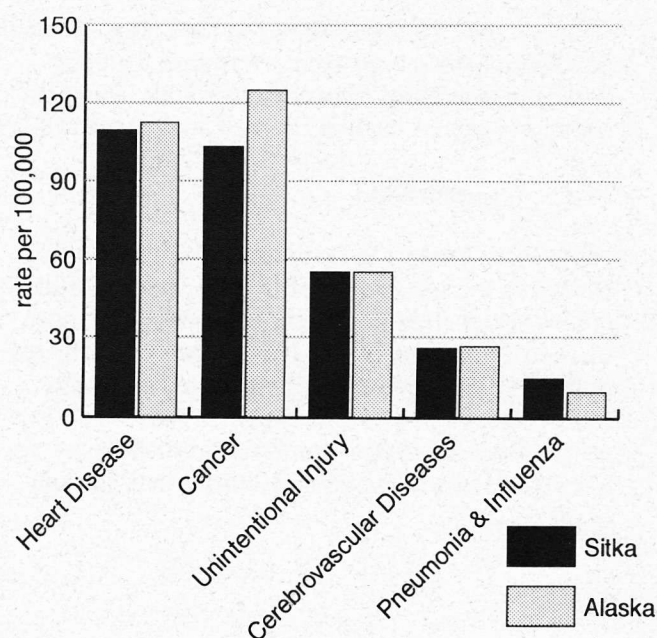
How are we doing?

Heart disease and cancer are the leading causes of death in the United States, and the same holds true for Alaska and Sitka. 46% of deaths in Sitka from 1990 to 1998 were due to heart disease and cancer. In the rest of the United States, cerebrovascular disease is the third leading cause of death, whereas in Sitka and Alaska we see unintentional injuries take that place. Drowning remains at the top of Sitka's list of injury-related deaths.

Why is this important?

The reasons for illness are often related to the way we live our lives – our physical activity levels, our eating habits and our emotional health. These are greatly influenced by our environment, the availability of safe recreation opportunities, a healthy diet, and a strong network of friends and social services.

Age-Adjusted Death Rates 1990-1998



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

Health

Sitka's Injury Hospitalization Rates Higher Than State

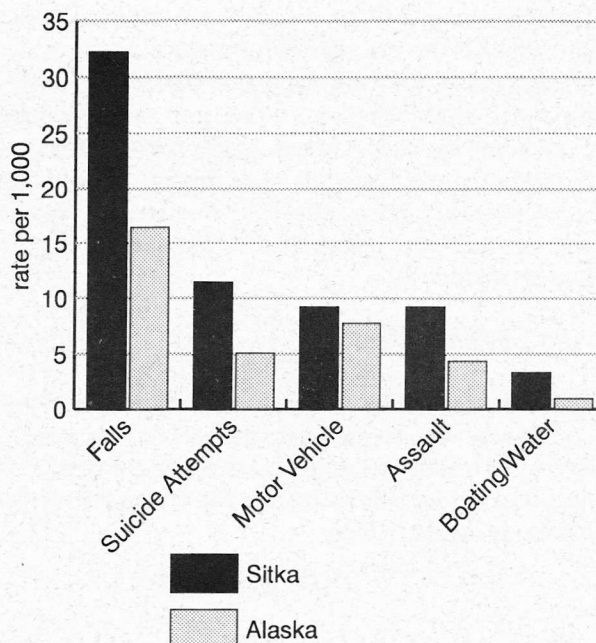
How are we doing?

Sitka's non-fatal injury hospitalization rates are consistently higher than the state's. Sitka's fall rate is about twice the state's rate, as are rates for suicide attempts, assault, and boating/water injury hospitalizations. Falls continue to lead the list of non-fatal injuries requiring hospitalization with 281 reported hospitalizations from 1991 to 1998.

Why is this important?

Injury hospitalizations cost Sitka in terms of health care services, emergency services and time off work and away from school. Injuries affect young people in the community, with 10 to 49 year olds being most at risk. The injuries surveyed are preventable with specific intervention and education services.

Non-Fatal Injury Hospitalizations 1991-1998



Source: Alaska Trauma Registry

Ages 20-35 Prime Childbearing Years

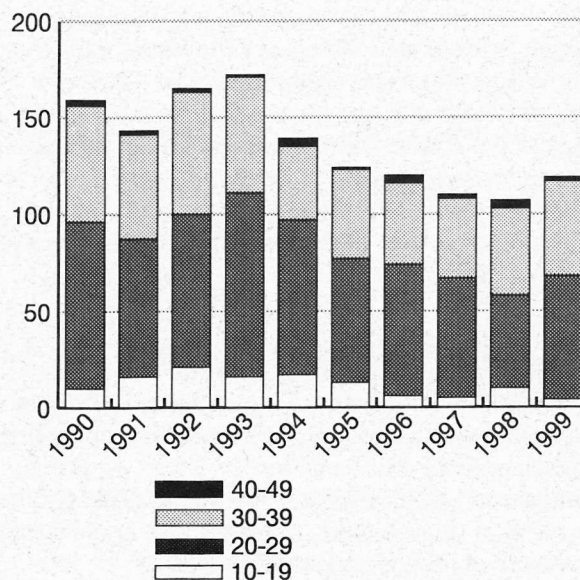
How are we doing?

Sitka has seen a general decline in the under 20 female population giving birth. Alaska has seen a greater decline in teen births than any other state. The most common ages for bearing children are between 20-39.

Why is this important?

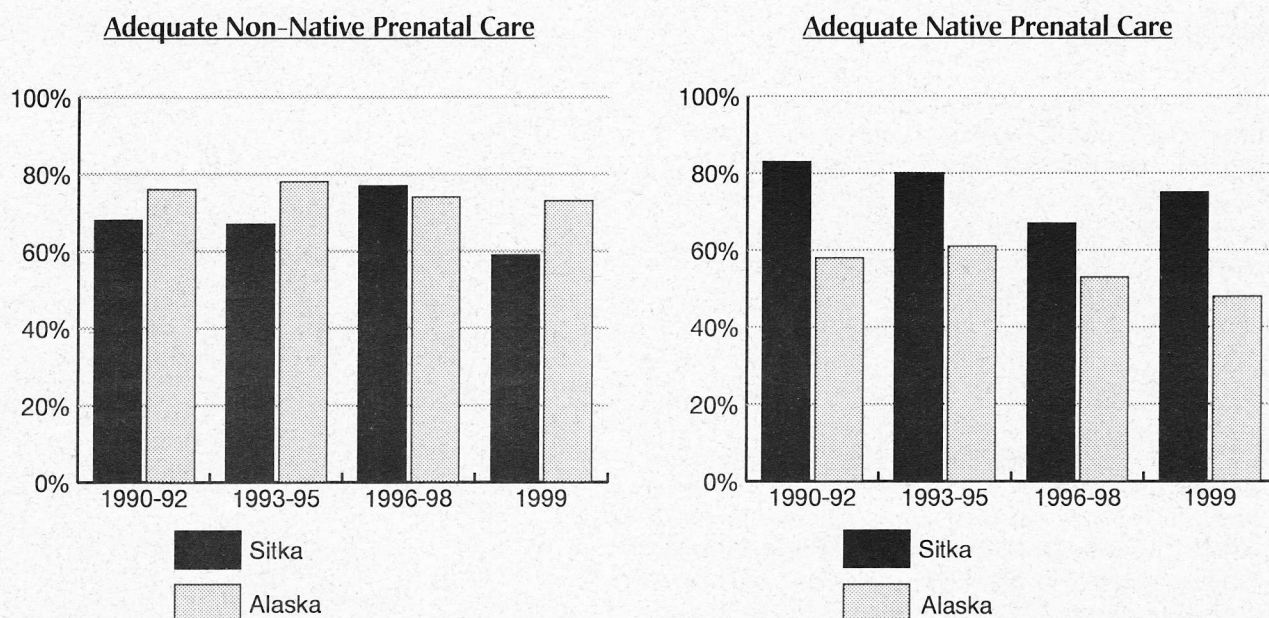
While there appears to be no clear-cut ideal age for childbirth, there is evidence that risks for complications are lowest when both parents are between the ages of 20 to 35 years of age. In women over 40, diabetes and high blood pressure are associated with risks to a successful birth, especially when the mother is also overweight. Chromosomal abnormalities are also a concern for both males and females over the age of 40.

Mother's Age at Child's Birth



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

Adequate Prenatal Care for Alaskan Natives Strong in Sitka



Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

Note: Prenatal care is defined as adequate by the Kessner index of the Institute of Medicine when health care begins in the first trimester and has at least 9 medical visits during that pregnancy.

How are we doing?

The percentage of Alaskan Natives receiving adequate prenatal care is higher in Sitka than in the rest of the state. On average, non-Native women in Sitka obtain slightly less prenatal care than their counterparts in the rest of the state. In Sitka, a higher percentage of Alaskan Natives receive adequate prenatal care than is true for non-Natives. The opposite is true statewide where a higher percentage of non-Natives receive adequate prenatal care than is true for Alaskan natives.

Why is this important?

Obtaining early and comprehensive prenatal care is the best thing a woman can do for her health and the health of her baby. Prenatal care provides more than physical health assessment, it also looks at the nurturing environment, parent readiness, and the emotional environment. Prenatal care helps reduce infant mortality, birth defects, poor nutrition, alcohol and other drug use, and low birth weight.

Health

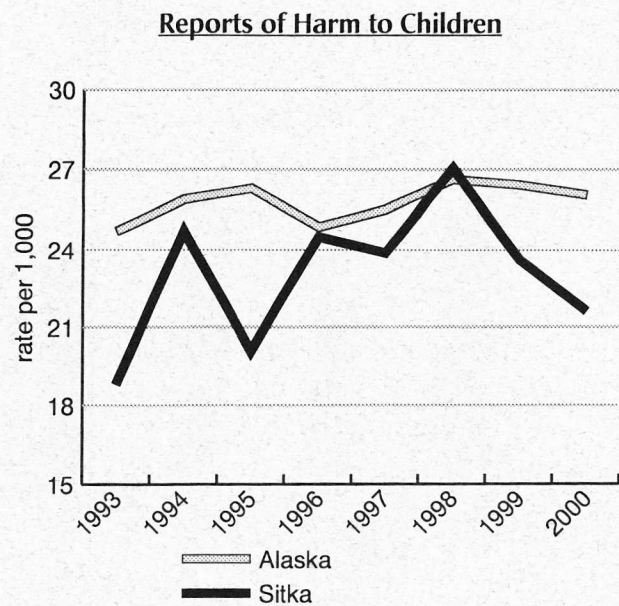
Harm to Children Continues to be of Concern

How are we doing?

There has been a decrease in reports of harm to children in Sitka over the past two years from a peak in 1998, with rates dropping from 27 per 1,000 to 22 per 1,000. Reports of harm to children statewide have remained steady at 26 per 1,000. At 57%, neglect remains the most common type of child harm reported, followed by physical abuse at 23%, sexual abuse at 11%, and mental injury at 9%.

Why is this important?

One-third of child abuse victims become abusive parents themselves. There is a strong correlation between domestic violence and child abuse, with both forms of violence frequently occurring in the same household. Ninety percent of juvenile delinquents and adult prisoners report having been abused as children. Changing this situation for children requires partnerships between community members, schools, law enforcement, state and health agencies to break this repetitive cycle.



Source: Department of Health & Social Services

Alcohol Remains Factor in Nearly Half of Violent Crimes

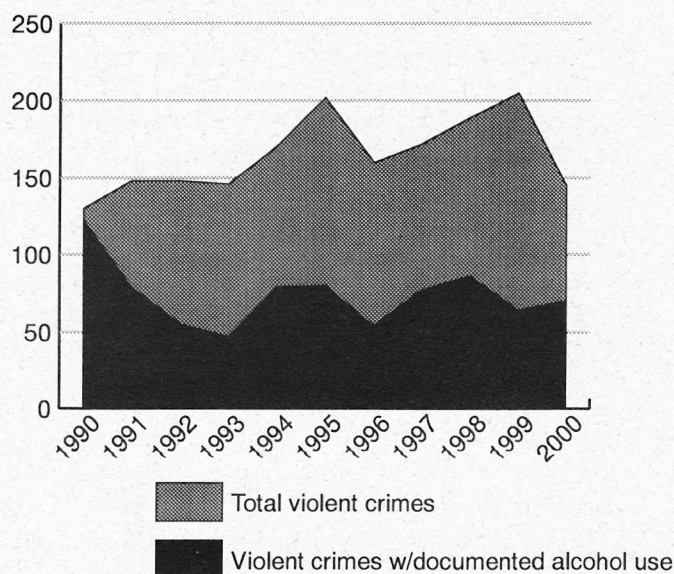
How are we doing?

There were 145 reported violent crimes in 2000, with alcohol involved in 70, nearly half the total. Other violent crimes in 2000 included: 125 simple assaults, 9 sexual assaults/offences, and 7 assaults with a deadly weapon. Due to the changes in the reporting classifications and a new method of keeping statistics at the Sitka Police Department, it is difficult to draw conclusions through comparisons with previous years.

Why is this important?

Violent crime continues to be a factor in the quality of life in Sitka. Violent crime has a painful and destructive effect on families and individuals. People experiencing crime have a higher level of fear and distrust on a routine basis. Efforts to curb crime can be an important catalyst to strengthening bonds between citizens and heightening their interest in and commitment to their community.

Reported Violent Crimes



Source: Sitka Police Department

Non-Violent Crime Affects the Entire Community

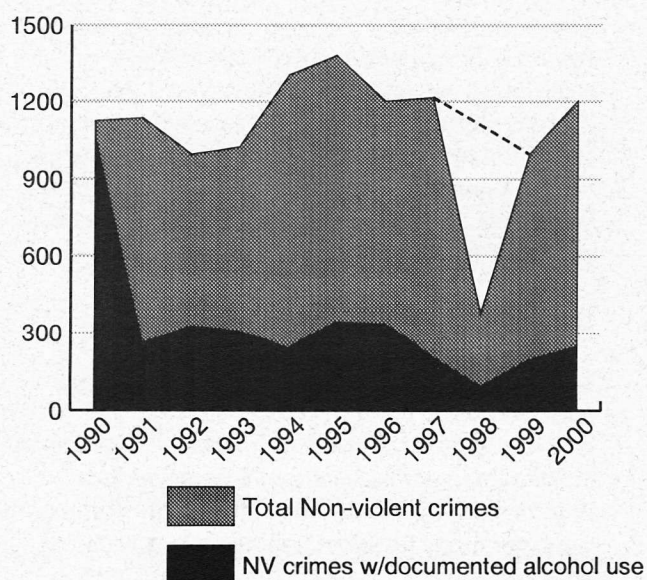
How are we doing?

There were 1,201 non-violent crimes reported in 2000. Of these, at least 21% were alcohol related. A detailed breakdown of the figures for 2000 includes: 332 thefts, 237 cases of criminal mischief, 121 cases of disorderly conduct, 115 DWIs, 107 cases of criminal trespassing, 94 stolen bicycles, 67 cases of drug abuse, 51 burglaries, 34 stolen vehicles, 28 cases of fraud and 15 cases of forgery/counterfeit. The significant drop in 1998 is probably due to a change in the reporting system at the Sitka Police Department and not an actual reduction in non-violent crimes that year. When non-violent and violent crimes are considered, there are between 3 and 4 crimes against persons or property every day.

Why is this important?

Non-violent crime has an impact on the overall quality of life in Sitka. Crime levels are an important reflection of the social fabric and health of the community.

Reported Non-Violent Crimes



Source: Sitka Police Department

Crime

Substance Related Crimes On the Rise

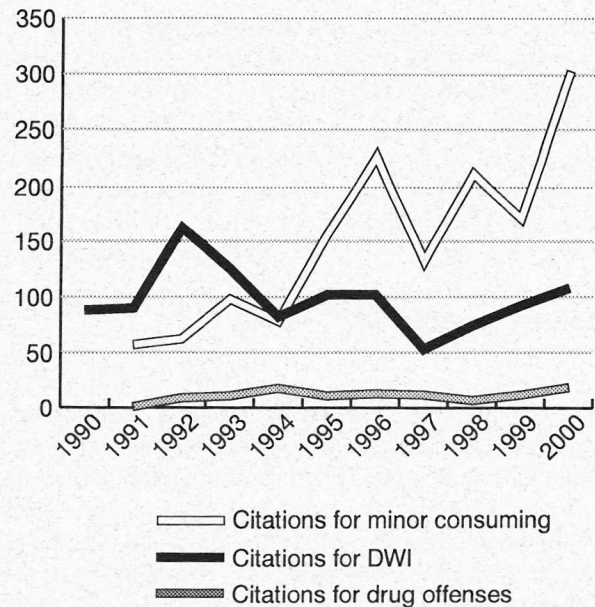
How are we doing?

Citations for minor consuming continue on an overall upward trend which may be due to increased enforcement. DWI arrests have doubled since 1997 while drug offences are slightly up. It is clear that alcohol use remains a significant factor in the community.

Why is this important?

Excessive alcohol consumption impacts work productivity, family life, and the safety of the whole community.

Substance Related Crimes



Source: Sitka Police Department

Domestic Violence is a Community Problem

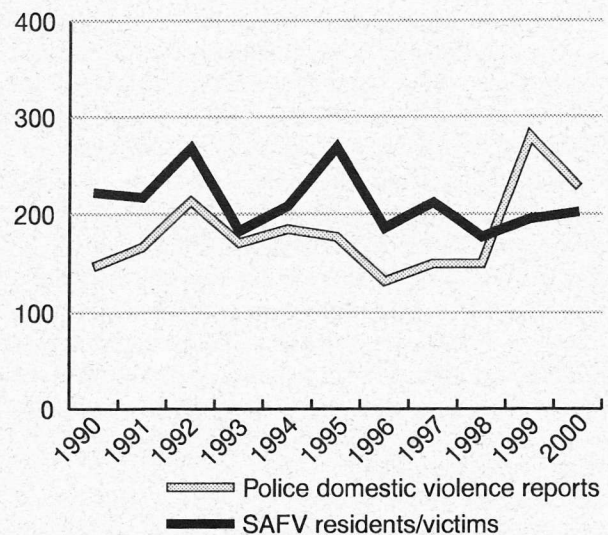
How are we doing?

Sitka is experiencing increases in domestic violence. Domestic disturbance calls are the majority of calls received by the Sitka Police Department. The Sitka Police Department changed to a new internal reporting computer system in 1999 which probably accounts for the increase in reports in 1999. The Sitka Police Department is now better able to track all domestic violence related reports.

Why is this important?

Because domestic violence is such a secretive and under-reported crime, it is estimated that only one in four incidents is reported. If that statistic were applied to Sitka there would be about 650 incidents a year. Domestic violence affects the entire community, is a community problem and needs a community response.

Domestic Violence



Sources: Sitka Police Department &
SAFV (Sitkans Against Family Violence)

Note: SAFV is the shelter and victim advocacy program in Sitka.

EMS Calls Increase While Fire Calls Remain Stable

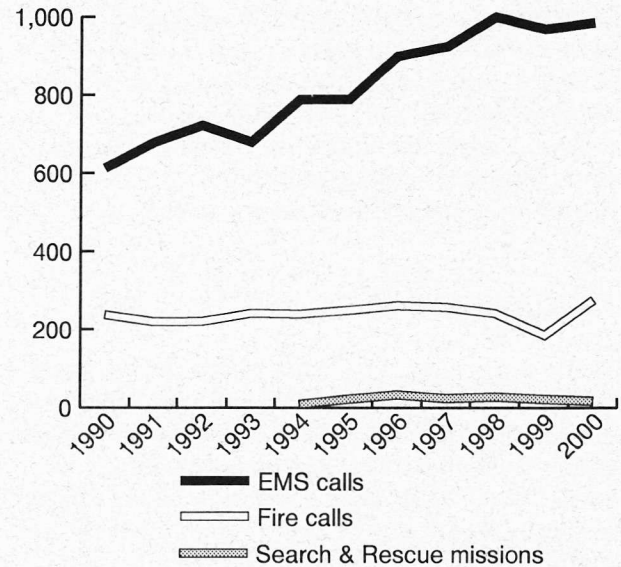
How are we doing?

Emergency medical service calls to the Sitka Volunteer Fire Department have increased more than 50% in the 10 year period ending in 2000. The steady growth jumped from 613 in 1990 to a high of 1,000 in 1998. Of those EMS calls in 2000 which resulted in patient care, 229 people were treated for trauma, 119 were treated for respiratory illness, 102 were treated for cardiac illness, and 315 were treated for various other conditions. Emergency fire calls to the department have remained stable during the years 1990-2000. The demand for search & rescue missions has also leveled out at around 20 calls annually.

Why is this important?

It is important to anticipate the demand upon the Sitka Volunteer Fire Department because it operates in relative isolation from other emergency service agencies in other areas.

Emergency Calls



Source: Sitka Fire Department

Safety Personnel Important in Sitka

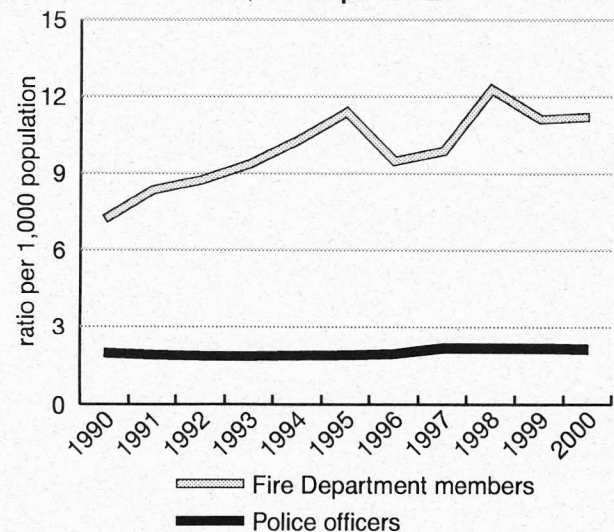
How are we doing?

A moderate increase in the ratio of Sitka emergency service personnel per 1,000 residents has taken place in the 10 years from 1990 to 2000. In 1990, 7 fire department staff members served for every 1,000 members of the population. The ratio peaked in 1998 and stands at 11 per 1,000 in 2000. During the same period, the ratio of Sitka police to general population has seen almost no growth. In 2000, as in 1990, 2 officers serve for every 1,000 Sitkans.

Why is this important?

One hallmark of a community is the safety and civility that emergency services and a police force provide. The level of community resources dedicated to counteract dangers and increase the level of protection shows the community commitment to safety.

Ratio of Police Officers & Fire Dept. Members to 1,000 Population



Sources: Sitka Police Department & Sitka Fire Department

Sitka—5th Highest Recreational Boating Fatality Rate in State

How are we doing?

Sitka's recreational boating fatality rate remains well above Alaska's average. Sitka's rate is the highest in Southeast Alaska and the 5th highest in the state. Also alarming is the number of near fatalities that take place every year, especially among young males. Education efforts regarding boating safety requirements have just recently increased and their effects have yet to be measured.

Why is this important?

Sitkans spend a lot of recreational time on the water. This increases the amount of time Sitkans find themselves at risk. The vast majority of Sitka boating fatalities involve both alcohol use and not wearing a life jacket. The use of life jackets and other safety equipment as well as not using alcohol while boating could contribute to a reduction in fatalities among Sitka's boaters.

Recreational Boating Fatality Rate



Source: Alaska Boating Safety Office

Background of *Sitka Community Indicators*

The idea of community indicators for Sitka emerged in the aftermath of Alaska Pulp Corporation's sudden closure of its mill in 1993. The loss of Sitka's largest employer produced much speculation about a looming economic crisis and Sitka's long-term future. Conflicting assumptions and reports about how the community was doing circulated widely. Information about important economic and social issues tended to be fragmented and without adequate context. What seemed to be missing was reliable information and a broader perspective on Sitka's condition that people could trust.

In the fall of 1997, just as the Turning Point partnership was getting organized, the Island Institute convened a series of community discussions of community sustainability issues and began identifying relevant indicators. After almost two years of effort involving many community volunteers, the Institute invited its Turning Point partners to add further health indicators and become co-sponsors of Sitka's first community indicators report. "Sitka Community Indicators 1999" was the result of that collaboration. The Institute continues to be actively involved, but this 2002 report is now fully the product of the Turning Point partnership.

About Sitka's Turning Point Partnership

Turning Point Towards Health is a partnership of diverse Sitka organizations and individuals whose mission is to engage the residents of Sitka and seize the opportunity to create a new approach to community health.

Its task is to evaluate the many issues that affect community vitality and engage the public in a collaborative process to improve and sustain that vitality. Specific activities include:

- examining the systems—physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, environmental, socio-cultural—that contribute to community health
- gathering relevant and reliable information
- actively seeking diverse public involvement.

Sitka's Turning Point partnership is a working group of volunteers with varied backgrounds and perspectives. It has no staff and is not incorporated or directed by any one organization. It has been associated with a multi-year coordinated national, state, and community planning effort called *Turning Point: Collaborating for a New Century in Public Health*. Through 2001, the project was supported by the Kellogg Foundation.

One of the goals of the Sitka Turning Point project is to collect information that provides a clear picture of the health status of our community and to use this information to inform the public and to assist organizations in their planning efforts.

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Acknowledgments

Many Sitkans and people outside of Sitka have assisted in this indicators report and we extend our appreciation to all of them.

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Data Sources

A special thanks to Alice Rarig & Elvin Assay, Alaska Department of Health & Social Services - Data & Evaluation Unit.

Indicators Project Coordinator

Laura Wertz-Stein was contracted by Turning Point to be the Coordinator for the 2002 Sitka Community Indicators report.