

Bethel, Alaska

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Bethel (*Mamterilleq* in Central Alaskan Yup'ik) is a city located near the west coast of the U.S. state of Alaska, approximately 400 miles (640 km) west of Anchorage. Accessible only by air and river, Bethel is the main port on the Kuskokwim River and is an administrative and transportation hub for the 56 villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

Bethel is the largest community in western Alaska and in the Unorganized Borough, as well as the 9th largest in the state, with a population of 6,080 as of the 2010 Census.^[5] Bethel is home to the lone detention center in southwestern Alaska, the Yukon Kuskokwim Correction Center.^[6] In 2009, Bethel opted out of status as a "Local Option" community, theoretically opening the door to allowing alcohol sales in the city; residents and city officials maintain that all liquor license requests will be actively opposed.^[7]

Annual events in Bethel include a noted dogsled race, the Kuskokwim 300, *Camai*, a traditional Yup'ik dance festival held each spring, and the Bethel Fair held in August.

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Bethel, Alaska Mamterillermiut Orutsararmuit	
City	
City of Bethel	
 Aerial view of Bethel on the Kuskokwim River	
 Location of Bethel within the state of Alaska Coordinates: 60°47'32"N 161°45'21"W	
Country	United States
State	Alaska
Borough	Unorganized
Census Area	Bethel
ANCSA regional corporation	Calista
Incorporated	August 1957[1]
Government[3][4]	
• Type	2nd Class City
• Mayor	Richard Robb[2]
• Manager	Ann Capela

History

Southwestern Alaska was the traditional place of Yup'ik people and their ancestors for thousands of years. They called their village *Mamterillermiut*, meaning "Smokehouse People", after their nearby fish smokehouse.^[8] It was an Alaska Commercial Company trading post during the late 19th century, and had a population of 41 people in the 1880 U.S. Census.

In 1885, the Moravian Church established a mission in the area under the leadership of Rev. John Henry Kilbuck, Jr., a Lenape, and his wife Edith, a daughter and granddaughter of Moravian missionaries in Kansas. They both learned Yup'ik, which greatly enhanced their effectiveness as missionaries. He made Yup'ik the language of the Moravian Church in the community and region, and helped translate scripture into the people's language. The missionaries moved Bethel from Mamterillermiut to its present location on the west side of the Kuskokwim River. A United States post office was opened in 1905.

Alaska Natives in this area have had a long Christian history, in part from Russian Orthodox, Catholic and Moravian influence. As in many Alaska Native villages, Christian tradition has become interwoven with the people's original culture.

Development came to the area during and after World War II, causing social disruption among the Alaska Natives.

In 1971 Bethel established a community radio, which has been a strong influence in the redevelopment and revival of Yup'ik culture and self-definition.^[9] It was the first Native-owned and operated radio station.^[10] Similar stations were soon started in Kotzebue, and by 1990, there were 10 stations in communities of fewer than 3,500 people.^[9]

On February 19, 1997, a school shooting attracted widespread media attention to Bethel when 16-year-old Evan Ramsey, a student at Bethel Regional High School, shot and killed his principal and one student and wounded two others, for which he later received a 210-year prison sentence.^{[11][12]}

In 2012, a person in town put signs all over stating that a Taco Bell would be coming soon, when in reality it was all an elaborate hoax and there wouldn't be a Taco Bell opening. Taco Bell corporate responded by airlifting a "taco truck" to Bethel to serve up to 10,000 tacos for the community. The event was featured in a commercial for Taco Bell^[13] and in a CNN report.^[14]

Geography

Area ^[4]	
 • Total	48.7 sq mi (126.1 km²)
 • Land	43.2 sq mi (111.8 km²)
 • Water	5.5 sq mi (14.3 km²)
Elevation	3 ft (1 m)
Population (2010)	
 • Total	6,080 Ranked 17th
 • Density	54.4/sq mi (21.0/km²)
 • Alaska Native	62%
Time zone	AST (UTC-9)
 • Summer (DST)	ADT (UTC-8)
ZIP code	99559
Area code	907
FIPS code	02-06520
GNIS feature ID	1398908 (http://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=gnispq:3:::NO::P3_FID:1398908)
Website	www.cityofbethel.org (http://www.cityofbethel.org/)

Bethel is located at 60°47′32″N 161°45′21″W﻿(/﻿60.792222; -161.755833).^[15] According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 48.7 square miles (126.1 km²), of which 43.2 square miles (111.8 km²) is land and 5.5 square miles (14.3 km²), or 11.34%, is water.^[5]

Though the region is flat and generally treeless, Bethel lies inside the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, the second largest wildlife refuge in the United States.

Climate

Bethel has a subarctic climate (Köppen *Dfc*), with long, somewhat snowy, and moderately cold winters, and short, mild summers. Monthly daily average temperatures range from 6.6 °F (−14.1 °C) in January to 56.0 °F (13.3 °C) in July, with an annual mean of 29.9 °F (−1.2 °C). Warm days of above 70 °F (21 °C) can be expected on 13 days per summer.^[16] Precipitation is both most frequent and greatest during the summer months, averaging 16.2 inches (411 mm) per year. Snowfall usually falls in light bouts, and is actually greater in November and December (before the sea freezes) than in January and February, averaging 45 inches (114 cm) a season. Extreme temperatures have ranged from −48 °F (−44 °C) to 90 °F (32 °C).

Climate data for Bethel, Alaska													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °F (°C)	49 (9)	51 (11)	53 (12)	63 (17)	80 (27)	90 (32)	86 (30)	87 (31)	76 (24)	65 (18)	60 (16)	49 (9)	90 (32)
Average high °F (°C)	12.4 (−10.9)	13.9 (−10.1)	21.8 (−5.7)	33.3 (0.7)	49.4 (9.7)	59.4 (15.2)	63.1 (17.3)	59.7 (15.4)	51.7 (10.9)	35.3 (1.8)	23.1 (−4.9)	15.6 (−9.1)	36.6 (2.6)
Daily mean °F (°C)	6.6 (−14.1)	7.6 (−13.6)	14.5 (−9.7)	25.9 (−3.4)	41.3 (5.2)	51.4 (10.8)	56.0 (13.3)	53.5 (11.9)	45.4 (7.4)	30.0 (−1.1)	17.4 (−8.1)	9.4 (−12.6)	29.9 (−1.2)
Average low °F (°C)	0.7 (−17.4)	1.3 (−17.1)	7.2 (−13.8)	18.4 (−7.6)	33.1 (0.6)	43.3 (6.3)	48.8 (9.3)	47.5 (8.6)	39.1 (3.9)	24.7 (−4.1)	11.7 (−11.3)	3.2 (−16)	23.3 (−4.8)
Record low °F (°C)	−48 (−44)	−40 (−40)	−42 (−41)	−31 (−35)	−5 (−21)	28 (−2)	30 (−1)	28 (−2)	18 (−8)	−6 (−21)	−31 (−35)	−44 (−42)	−48 (−44)
Average precipitation inches (mm)	.62 (15.7)	.51 (13)	.67 (17)	.65 (16.5)	.85 (21.6)	1.60 (40.6)	2.03 (51.6)	3.02 (76.7)	2.31 (58.7)	1.43 (36.3)	1.37 (34.8)	1.12 (28.4)	16.18 (411)
Average snowfall inches (cm)	5.8 (14.7)	3.8 (9.7)	6.5 (16.5)	4.1 (10.4)	1.7 (4.3)	.1 (0.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	.3 (0.8)	3.8 (9.7)	8.9 (22.6)	9.5 (24.1)	44.5 (113)
Avg. precipitation days (≥ 0.01 in)	8.7	5.8	8.6	8.9	11.0	13.2	15.1	18.3	17.2	12.7	11.8	11.0	142.3
Avg. snowy days (≥ 0.1 in)	7.9	4.8	7.7	6.9	2.3	.1	0	0	.5	5.9	9.1	9.0	54.2
Source: NOAA (normals, 1971–2000), ^[16] Weather.com (extremes) ^[17]													

Demographics

As of the census of 2000,^[20] there were 5,471 people, 1,741 households, and 1,190 families residing in the city. The population density was 125.0 people per square mile (48.3/km²). There were 1,990 housing units at an average density of 45.5 per square mile (17.6/km²). The racial makeup of the city was 26.83% White, 0.93% Black or African American, 61.78%

Historical population		
Census	Pop.	%±
1910	110	—
1920	221	100.9%
1930	278	25.8%
1940	376	35.3%

Native American, 2.87% Asian, 0.16% Pacific Islander, 0.51% from other races, and 6.91% from two or more races. Hispanics or Latinos of any race were 1.70% of the population.

There were 1,741 households out of which 44.1% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 42.6% were married couples living together, 15.2% had a female householder with no husband present, and 33.7% were non-families. 24.5% of all households were made up of individuals and 3.2% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 3.00 and the average family size was 3.65.

The age distribution was 35.5% under 18, 9.0% from 18 to 24, 32.7% from 25 to 44, 18.9% from 45 to 64, and 3.9% who were 65 or older. The median age was 29 years. For every 100 females there were 110.4 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 109.6 males.

The median income for a household in the city was \$57,321, and the median income for a family was \$62,431. Males had a median income of \$45,321 versus \$39,010 for females. The per capita income for the city is \$20,267. About 10.6% of the families and 11.2% of the population were below the poverty line, including 9.7% of those under the age of 18 and 18.3% of those ages 64 and over.

Transportation and economy

The state-owned Bethel Airport is the regional transportation hub, and is served by seven passenger carriers, including Alaska Airlines, Grant Aviation, Hageland Aviation Services, Era Alaska, Yute Air, Renfroe's Alaskan Adventure, and Ryan Air. It also receives service from four cargo operators: Everts Air Cargo, Northern Air Cargo, Lynden Air Cargo, and numerous small air taxi services. The airport ranks third in the state for total number of flights. It offers a 6,400 foot asphalt runway, a 4,000 foot asphalt runway, and 1,850 foot gravel crosswind runway, and is currently undergoing a \$7 million renovation and expansion. Three float plane bases are nearby: Hangar Lake, H Marker Lake, and the Kuskokwim River.

The Port of Bethel is the northernmost medium-draft port in the United States. River travel is the primary means of local transportation in the summer. A Bethel-based barge service provides goods to Kuskokwim villages.

Within Bethel there are approximately 16 miles (26 km) of roads which are not connected to any contiguous highway system. Winter ice roads lead to several local villages, but their condition varies depending on temperature and snow fall. An extensive network of snow machine trails connects Bethel to villages all over the Delta, from the Bering Sea to the Yukon.

The town's single paved road—about 10 miles—supports a surprisingly large taxicab industry. With 93 taxi drivers, the town has more cab drivers per capita than any other city in the country, making it the unlikely taxicab capital of the United States. Most local cab drivers are Albanian or South Korean immigrants lured north by reports of good money.^[21]

A relatively recent addition to the economy of Bethel is farming. Initiated by a small organic farm, Meyers Farm (<http://meyersfarm.net/about>) local food production in Bethel has been increasing. A winner of the Alaska Marketplace (<http://www.alaskamarketplace.org>) competition, the Meyers Farm has been providing organic produce for the local population of Bethel.

1940	516	55.5%
1950	651	73.1%
1960	1,258	93.2%
1970	2,416	92.1%
1980	3,576	48.0%
1990	4,674	30.7%
2000	5,471	17.1%
2010	6,080	11.1%
Est. 2014	6,415 ^[18]	5.5%

U.S. Decennial Census^[19]

Bethel is also the site of a proposed major Alaskan coal-fired power station, and a unique 8.5-mile (13.7 km) prototype single-wire earth return electrical intertie to Napakiak, Alaska, constructed in 1981.^[22]

Education

- Lower Kuskokwim School District (<http://www.lksd.org/lksd/>)
- Ayaprun Elitnaurvik (http://web2.lksd.org/ayaprun/Ayaprun_Elitnaurvik/Home_Page.html) - Yup'ik Immersion School
- Mikelnguut Elitnaurviat Elementary School (<http://www.lksd.org/me/>)
- Bethel Regional High School (<http://web2.lksd.org/brhs/>)
- Gladys Jung Elementary School (http://www.lksd.org/Gladys_Jung/)
- Bethel Alternative Boarding school
- University of Alaska Fairbanks – Kuskokwim Campus (<http://www.bethel.uaf.edu/>)
- Yuut Elitnaurvik (<http://www.yuut.org/>)

Sports and recreation

Bethel is home to a noted mid-distance dogsled race, the Kuskokwim 300. Held every January since 1980, the race commemorates an early mail route that once tied the settlement to the outside world. Top mushers and hundreds of sled dogs participate in the race for a purse of \$100,000, the largest offered by any 300-mile (480 km) sled dog race.^[23]

Local recreational activities include snow machining, skiing, bicycling, kayaking, caribou hunting, and salmon fishing.

Arts and culture

Traditional dancers from all over Alaska and beyond participate every March in the Cama-i dance festival. Hundreds of costumed dancers, drummers, and singers perform traditional Yup'ik story dances during the three-day festival, sponsored by the Bethel Council on the Arts. "Cama-i" (pronounced Cha-Mai) translates as "a warm hello."^[24]

The Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center also hosts a bimonthly "Saturday Market" where artisans and crafters from the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta come to sell their crafts. There is a variety at the market, but many of the crafts include traditional Yup'ik qaspeq, story knives, woven baskets, ulu knives and more.

Health care

Bethel and the smaller communities surrounding it are primarily served by Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Hospital, a 50-bed general acute care medical facility. Services located in the hospital include an adult medical-surgical ward, a pediatric ward, an obstetric ward, as well as outpatient family medicine clinics, an emergency room, pharmacy, lab, X-ray, and specialty clinics. The facility is accessible by road for those individuals living in or visiting the city of Bethel. Depending on weather and the season, road access to the hospital may also be available to some of the surrounding communities. If not, individuals must be airlifted into the facility via helicopter or air ambulance. Also, there are five sub-regional primary care clinics located in some of the more remote and less populated cities neighboring Bethel (Emmonak, St.

Mary's, Aniak, Toksook Bay, and Hooper Bay). Many of the services found at the hospital in Bethel are also available at these sub-regional clinics, such as urgent care, diagnostic review, physical exams, prenatal care, minor surgery, laboratory tests, X-rays, and distribution of medications. The hospital, sub-regional clinics, and additional village clinics are all part of Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation. ^{[25][26]}



Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Hospital in Bethel, Alaska

Media

Bethel has a public television station, KYUK-TV, and two radio stations, public KYUK and private, non-profit KYKD. Since the founding of its community radio station in 1970, the media has become part of Yup'ik development in southwest Alaska and important to the people's self-definition.^[9] The city is also home to the weekly regional newspapers *Delta Discovery* and *Tundra Drums*.

Sister cities

Bethel has one official sister city.

- Anadyr, Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, Russian Federation

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External links

- Official website (<http://www.cityofbethel.org/>)
- Kuskokwim 300 (<http://www.k300.org/wordpress/>)
- Bethel Council on the Arts (<http://www.bethelarts.com/>)
- Bethel, Alaska (https://www.dmoz.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/Alaska/Localities/B/Bethel) at DMOZ



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Categories: Bethel, Alaska | Cities in Alaska | Cities in Bethel Census Area, Alaska | History of the Alaska Province of the Moravian Church | Cities in Unorganized Borough, Alaska

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