

A high-value resource in Alaska

The state mines and exports a range of precious metals

By **KARINNE WIEBOLD**

Ground zero for gold fever in the late 1800s, Alaska has been shaped in many ways by mining. Nome, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Skagway all formed around gold mining, and in the modern era, the Northwest Arctic Borough was incorporated in tandem with the development of Red Dog, one of the world's largest zinc mines.

Today, Alaska has six large operating metal mines that produce massive amounts of gold, silver, zinc, and lead while recovering small amounts of copper

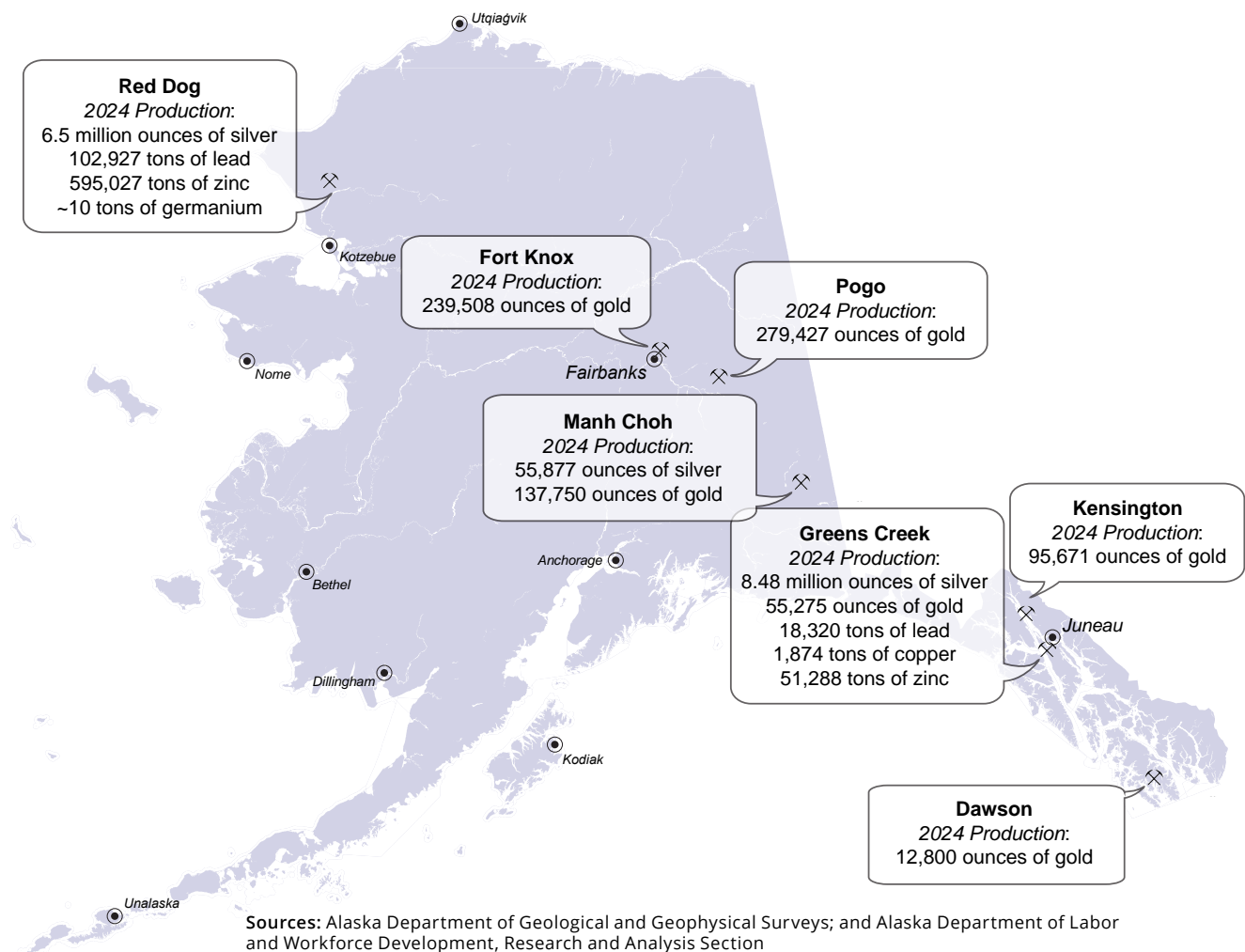
and germanium. Alaska also has hundreds of small placer mines operating across the state.

The six major mines

Juneau is home to two of these mines, Kensington and Greens Creek, the latter of which is the largest silver producer in the United States. Both are off the road system but are large private local employers and major property tax contributors to Juneau.

The Red Dog Mine, located near Kotzebue, produces

Major metal mines in Alaska and their production in 2024



Alaska export value for select commodities over time, in 2025 dollars

Export	2014 (mil)	2015 (mil)	2016 (mil)	2017 (mil)	2018 (mil)	2019 (mil)	2020 (mil)	2021 (mil)	2022 (mil)	2023 (mil)	2024 (mil)	2025 (mil)
Zinc Ores/Concentrates	\$1,345	\$1,112	\$1,056	\$1,529	\$1,463	\$1,232	\$875	\$1,525	\$1,540	\$956	\$1,300	\$1,336
Lead Ores/Concentrates	\$462	\$410	\$478	\$535	\$449	\$490	\$458	\$586	\$383	\$437	\$463	\$376
Precious Metals exc Silver	\$176	\$193	\$185	\$163	\$174	\$185	\$221	\$236	\$199	\$175	\$236	\$364
Silver Ores/Concentrates	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$255
Gold (incl Plat Plated)	\$6	\$4	\$10	\$9	\$7	\$321	\$434	\$620	\$674	\$809	\$1,004	\$1,129

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S.A. trade statistics

germanium as a byproduct of its massive zinc operation. As of 2024, it was the only mine in the country to produce germanium, which is used as a semiconductor in electronics, solar panels, and electric vehicles. Germanium became an unexpected focus in 2024 when China, the world's largest producer, banned exports to the U.S.

In the Interior, Fairbanks benefits from the Manh Choh mine 240 miles away, as the gold is milled near Fairbanks at Fort Knox. Several times a year, Fort Knox stops production and switches to milling Manh Choh's ore, deposited by special transport trucks that operate around the clock and average 60 trips per day, seven days a week.

This business model is under consideration for other mines, as it simplifies a complex, time-consuming, and expensive component of mine development by milling and storing tailings at a preexisting location.

Export, total values have climbed

Mining's contribution to Alaska's gross domestic product has been strong in recent years, exceeding

Top Alaska global exports, 2025

Export	Value in 2025
Fish, Frozen (no Fish Fillets or Other Fish Meat)	\$1,631,821,778
Zinc Ores And Concentrates	\$1,335,586,554
Gold (incl Plat Plated)	\$1,128,851,015
Fish Fillets, Other Fish Meat, Fresh, Chill Or Froz	\$816,744,079
Precious Metal Ores And Concentrates	\$619,301,552
Lead Ores And Concentrates	\$375,793,340
Civilian Aircraft, Engines, And Parts	\$167,480,604
Crude Oil From Petroleum/Bituminous Minerals	\$150,398,472
Flour, Meal Etc. of Meat, Not For Humans	\$98,025,027
Oil (Not Crude) From Petrol and Bitum Mineral Etc.	\$95,907,824

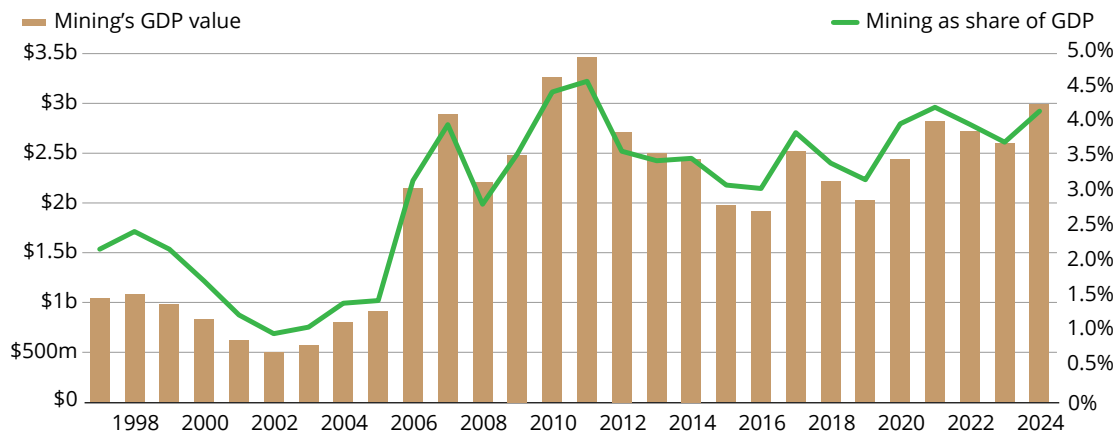
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S.A. trade statistics

\$2 billion each of the last five years and approaching \$3 billion in 2024, adjusted for inflation.

Mining's value peaked in 2010 and 2011 as the U.S. was recovering from the Great Recession. Commodity prices soared, including gold and silver, and the Kensington gold mine opened.

Gold prices continued to climb in recent years, starting in 2020 and gathering momentum in 2025 and early 2026. Another major gold mine, Manh Choh,

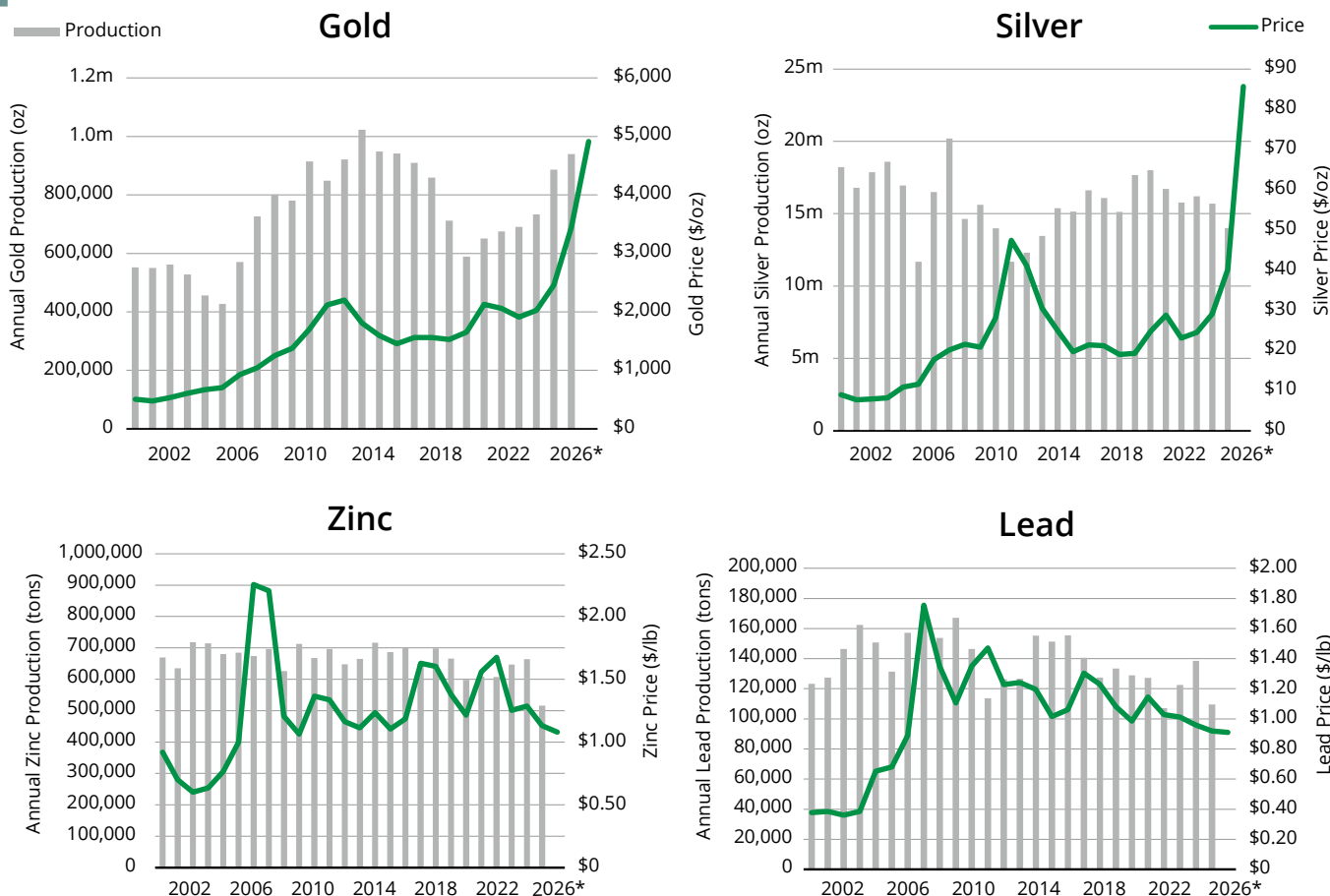
Mining's value, share of Alaska GDP have grown considerably



Note: Inflation-adjusted to 2024 dollars. Excludes oil and gas. Includes coal, sand, and gravel.

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Production and prices for Alaska's main mined metals



*2026 price is an early average. Prices are inflation-adjusted to 2025 dollars. Values for 2025 are DGGs preliminary estimates. Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and Alaska Department of Geological and Geophysical Surveys

opened earlier this decade.

Zinc and lead prices spiked in 2007, driving up mining's contribution to GDP that year. But for most of the last two decades, mining has generated between 3 and 4.5 percent of Alaska's GDP.

The global *export* value of Alaska's minerals is also significant. In 2025, Alaska zinc exports were valued at \$1.3 billion, second only to frozen fish. Gold was a close third at \$1.1 billion. Precious metals and lead also ranked among the state's top exports.

Metal mining export values have grown substantially over the last two years, driven by zinc, gold, and silver. (See the tables on this page.)

GDP value and export value both rely on a combination of price and production, but not everything that's produced is exported — some goes to domestic users — and exports can vary year to year depending on who buys the commodities. On top of

that, GDP and export values for metals and minerals are calculated differently.

The number of jobs has grown by 37 percent in a decade

Alaska had 3,533 metal mining and support jobs in 2024, the most recent year available, and the industry has grown much faster in Alaska than it has nationwide. (See the exhibit on the next page.) It has also grown much faster than jobs in Alaska overall. Metal mining employment rose 37 percent over the last decade. The total job count increased by just 0.3 percent over the same period.

The industry also pays high wages, at an average of \$135,000 in 2024. That was second only to the oil and gas industry and significantly more than the average Alaska job, which paid \$71,000 that year.

Another way to look at the industry's impact is the number of *people* who work in metal mining in a given year, the difference being that more than one worker can occupy a single job over the course of a year.

In 2024, 4,600 people worked in the metal mining industry at some point, representing about 1 percent of the state's workers. Fifty-six percent were Alaska residents, mostly men in their 20s to 40s. Nearly 500 were women (about 17 percent).

The number of mining workers has been on the rise for eight years, with an increasing share coming from out of state.

Current projects and challenges

Growth prospects appear strong. Multiple mines are in the exploration phases, and the political climate favors development. The Department of Geological and Geophysical Surveys estimates Alaska had about 60 active exploration projects last year.

The federal government has also taken an active role in Alaska's resource development future, committing \$37.5 million in 2023 to Graphite One's feasibility study through a Department of Defense grant.

The current administration has also fast-tracked permitting during the second Trump term and reversed some of the development-restricting decisions and executive orders of the previous administration.

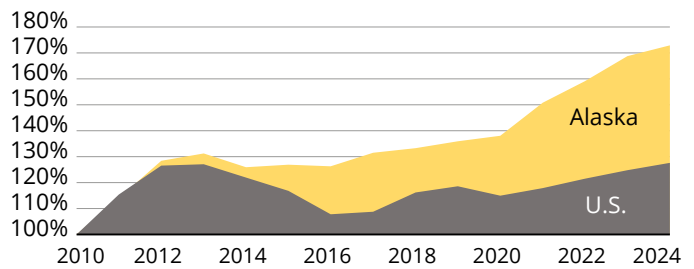
In 2025, the federal government reinstated key permits for the Ambler Access project for mining exploration and announced plans to invest \$35.6 million this year in mining exploration, taking an equity stake in Trilogy Metals.

The federal FAST-41 program streamlines federal permitting for large projects and aims to fast-track development. Donlin (gold), Graphite Creek (graphite), and the Johnson Tract (gold, silver, zinc, copper, and lead) are all on the list, as are other nonmetal projects such as the liquefied natural gas pipeline and two broadband/fiber optic projects.

Mines take years to come to fruition — exploration, feasibility studies, environmental reviews, and permitting are expensive, and all have the potential to derail a project. Public concerns and controversy can also slow or stop development.

The proposed Pebble Mine in Southwest Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed was blocked twice by the feds: first in 2020 by the Army Corps of Engineers and again in 2023 by the Environmental Protection

Growth in metal mining jobs



Note: Annual jobs are indexed to 2010, so the Y axis shows the year's job count as a percentage of 2010.
Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

About the data

Alaska's metal mining industry includes mostly gold, silver, zinc, and lead, but not coal, gravel, or rock (however, those three are included in the GDP data on page 5). This article also includes support services directly related to metal mining.

State-level gross domestic product is not available at the same level of detail as national figures. It includes all mining, excluding oil and gas extraction. We allocated mining support services between oil and gas and all other mining according to each industry's contribution to GDP.

Agency over critical salmon habitat concerns. The EPA determination is under appeal.

The Donlin gold mine in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Census Area near Crooked Creek is now on the FAST-41 list but still faces multiple regulatory steps.

The Palmer project outside Haines is in advanced exploration and includes federal, state, and Mental Health Trust land. It has also faced environmental litigation and changed hands several times (including last year), which is common in mine development.

The New Amalga project in Juneau remains on the prospective list but has spurred local controversy around the use of the proposed Cascade Point ferry terminal. Critics assert the proposed public infrastructure would primarily benefit the mine.

The Johnson Tract, also on FAST-41, is on Alaska Native land surrounded by Lake Clark National Park, which complicates but doesn't preclude development.

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