

Fairbanks jobs forecast for 2026

The borough's biggest economic drivers remain stable

By KARINNE WIEBOLD

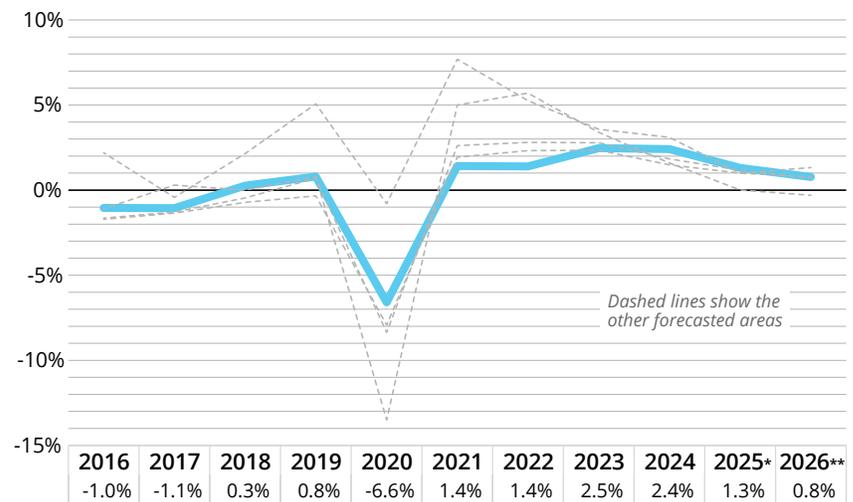
Job growth of about 1 percent is in the forecast for the Fairbanks area this year, with gains or stability in all sectors except federal and local government.

Fairbanks' major economic drivers remain stable, although some face headwinds.

Mining remains strong, University of Alaska Fairbanks enrollment has been steady, and employment has been rising slowly. The military's significant presence in the Interior is also stable.

While tourism has rebounded since the pandemic, strained

Fairbanks job growth forecasted at 0.8 percent



*Preliminary **Forecasted

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The outlook for jobs in the Fairbanks North Star Borough, by industry

	Monthly avg, 2024 ¹	Monthly avg, 2025 ¹	Change, 2024-25	Percent change	JOBS FORECAST		
					Monthly avg, 2026	Change, 2025-26	Percent change
Total Nonfarm Employment²	38,200	38,700	500	1.3%	39,000	300	0.8%
Total Private	27,600	28,100	500	1.8%	28,600	500	1.8%
Mining and Logging	900	900	0	0%	900	0	0%
Construction	2,900	2,700	-200	-6.9%	2,700	0	0%
Manufacturing	700	700	0	0%	800	100	14.3%
Transportation, Trade and Utilities	7,700	8,100	400	5.2%	8,300	200	2.5%
Wholesale Trade	600	700	100	16.7%	700	0	0%
Retail Trade	4,600	4,700	100	2.2%	4,800	100	2.1%
Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities	2,500	2,700	200	8.0%	2,800	100	3.7%
Information	300	300	0	0%	300	0	0%
Financial Activities	1,100	1,100	0	0%	1,100	0	0%
Professional and Business Services	2,400	2,400	0	0%	2,400	0	0%
Educational (private) and Health Services	5,900	6,200	300	5.1%	6,400	200	3.2%
Health Care	4,600	4,900	300	6.5%	5,100	200	4.1%
Leisure and Hospitality	4,400	4,400	0	0%	4,400	0	0%
Other Services	1,300	1,300	0	0%	1,300	0	0%
Total Government	10,600	10,500	-100	-0.9%	10,400	-100	-1.0%
Federal, except military	3,300	3,200	-100	-3.0%	3,100	-100	-3.1%
State, incl. University of Alaska	4,600	4,700	100	2.2%	4,800	100	2.1%
Local and tribal, incl. public schools	2,700	2,600	-100	-3.7%	2,500	-100	-3.8%

¹Preliminary and adjusted estimates. ²Excludes the self-employed, uniformed military, most commercial fishermen, domestic workers, and unpaid family workers.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

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international relations and the specter of a U.S. recession could reduce visitor numbers in 2026. Relative to other parts of Alaska, international tourists are especially important to Fairbanks.

The \$148 million, multi-year Moose Creek barrier wall — the largest civil project the Army Corps of Engineers has undertaken in Alaska in 30 years — neared completion in 2025 but has generated relatively few jobs. Large and expensive projects are often heavy on materials, transportation, equipment, and engineering instead of labor.

Construction lost jobs in 2025, primarily in heavy and civil construction, including roads and bridges. However, some major federally funded infrastructure projects remain on the horizon. Pending and in-progress projects include replacement of the Chena Flood Control Bridge and three others: Johnson, Gerstle, and Robertson.

Military will provide some stability amid other federal cuts

The Fairbanks North Star Borough is home to two military installations, Fort Wainwright and Eielson Air Force Base. It also supports Fort Greely near Delta Junction and Clear Space Force Station in the Denali Borough.

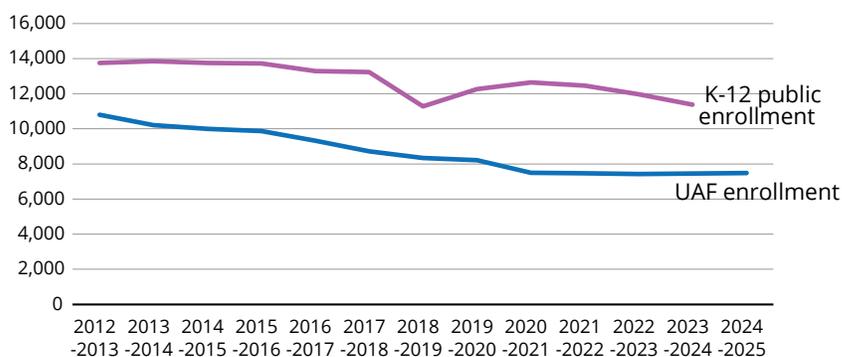
The military is a major driver of the area's economy. Fairbanks has a unique arctic training environment in a globally strategic location, and its bases generate federal civilian jobs and hire private contractors. Service members and families also support local businesses.

The Fairbanks area had 9,500 active-duty service members and thousands of dependents in 2025.

Eielson Air Force Base boosted the population in 2022 when the final two F-35 fighter jets arrived to complete the squadron. Four additional KC-135 refueling tankers are expected to start arriving in fall 2026, bringing an additional 200 airmen and their families.

Fairbanks is also home to about 9,000 veterans, making up nearly 10 percent of the borough's

UAF enrollment rises slightly and K-12 declines



Source: The University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District

population — even higher than the statewide percentage, which leads the nation for resident veterans. These veterans bring millions in federal benefits to the area each year.

Given that strong military presence, about 70 percent of the borough's federal civilian employment is in the Department of Defense, not including government contractors.

Fairbanks' federal employment had been stable until last year, and the area will lose about 100 federal jobs again in 2026. (As the statewide article details, federal job numbers for 2025 are preliminary, but they show losses.) However, national security and defense priorities suggest military-related employment will be somewhat insulated from deep federal cuts.

Growth for the university, but research funding cuts loom

The University of Alaska Fairbanks is the public university system's flagship campus. UAF employed 2,900 people and had about 7,500 students in 2024, the most recent year available. Both numbers are considerably lower than a decade ago.

Enrollment declined over most of the last decade but has stabilized since the pandemic. University employment fell by nearly a third from 2013 to 2021, bottoming out at 2,500 jobs. The university has added back 400 jobs since 2021 and we expect it to represent the bulk of state government growth in 2026, at 100 forecasted jobs.

However, the university faces further cuts to research and other federally funded programs and partnerships this year. The federal government has

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a large presence in Fairbanks through UAF as well as the military, and the Trump administration's aggressive pursuit of direct cuts to jobs and federal contracts includes the types of grants and contracts the university holds.

Mining, related jobs steady longer-term

Gold prices were high in 2025, hitting nearly \$4,500/ounce in late December following a rapid escalation that began in early 2024.

Fairbanks has one large mine, Fort Knox, and 12 small ones. Nearby operations that benefit Fairbanks include the Pogo Gold Mine in the Southeast Fairbanks Census Area and the Manh Choh mine near Tetlin, which opened in 2023 and poured its first bar of gold in 2024. Ore from Manh Choh is trucked 240 miles to Fort Knox to be milled, generating transportation and mining jobs.

Manh Choh has a five-year anticipated lifespan with the potential for adjacent development. The company expects mining will wrap up in 2027 and milling in 2028, though additional possibilities are under consideration.

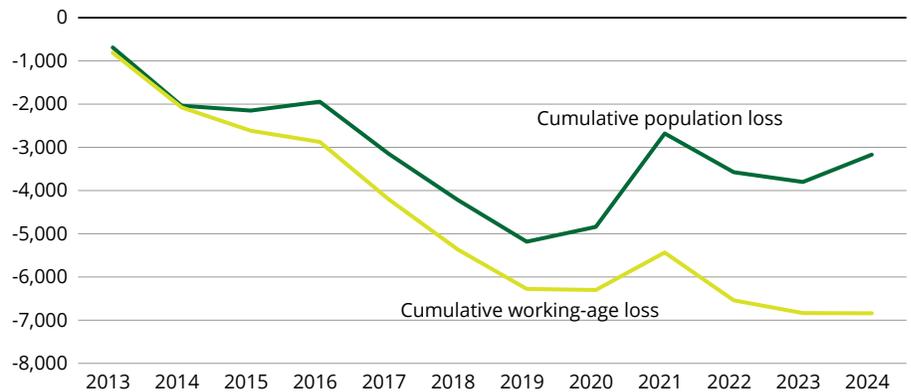
The Fairbanks mining industry weathered the pandemic without substantial job loss and has grown slightly since. We forecast mining will remain flat in 2026, and transportation will add 100 jobs.

Tourism faces challenges, but no job loss in the forecast

About 20 percent of Alaska's visitors reach the Interior, and tourist numbers have rebounded since the pandemic. Fairbanks is also a winter destination with dog sleds, northern lights, ice carving, and hot springs. Airport passenger numbers hit 1,195,288 in state fiscal year 2025, the highest post-COVID.

It hasn't all been smooth sailing. Denali National Park is a major draw, but the 2021 Pretty Rocks landslide closed the only road into the park, and the 2024 wildfires further reduced visitor numbers.

Fairbanks' working-age group loss levels out



Note: Prime working age is 18-64

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The road will not reopen until 2027. Economic pressures and international tension will also weigh on visitor numbers this year.

Leisure and hospitality employment, which partly supports tourism, is expected to remain flat in 2026.

How Fairbanks' regional hub status affects the outlook for jobs

Fairbanks is the largest city in the Interior, serving communities hundreds of miles upriver or off the highway that depend on it for health care, shopping, and transportation. Its location on the railbelt and road system, plus an international airport, also positions Fairbanks to benefit from surrounding economic activity, including oil and gas and potential new mines outside the borough.

While Fairbanks' position is secure in size and location, some changes are eroding its advantage. Online shopping, accelerated during the pandemic, has replaced some traditional retail, cutting employment over the decade. Other hub activities, including banking and routine medical visits, have also moved online.

Amazon opened a sorting facility at the airport in 2021 and a delivery facility in 2024, but those generated warehousing and transportation jobs rather than retail.

Retail employment grew in 2025 with a new grocery store in North Pole, and we forecast the area will

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residents whose skills make them marketable in other job markets.

Like Alaska as a whole, Southeast has seen a long stretch of negative net migration — more people moving out than in. The reasons people move are personal and varied, but surveys cite the major factors as job opportunities, family, health, quality of schools, and the mix of community amenities. Some combination of those factors has reduced the relative attractiveness of living in Southeast over the last decade.

The regional population peaked at about 75,000 in 2015 and was down to about 71,000 in 2024. That's

not a dramatic decrease, and declines in some parts of the region have leveled off or reversed slightly.

Because Southeast has the state's oldest population, however, minimal growth is projected from "natural increase" — births minus deaths. That means the region will depend on migration if it is to grow in the next several decades.

The data are clear in recent years that employment growth doesn't necessarily create population growth, although the two are correlated over the long term. Tourism and mining are two industries that are almost certain to add jobs to the region's economy in the coming years. Whether they add residents to the region's population count is less certain.

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add another 100 retail jobs in 2026.

Health care's job count rose by 300 in 2025, although some of that growth came from technical changes in how those jobs are counted rather than actual increases. We forecast another 200 health care jobs in 2026 as the population continues to age. The number of borough residents over age 65 has grown 88 percent since 2012, to more than 13,000.

Other Fairbanks industries track with health of main drivers

The main drivers discussed above support a range of other industries, and we expect them to grow or hold steady in tandem.

The rest of the North Star Borough's economy also depends on population size, demographics, and local spending versus dollars leaving the area.

The borough's population peaked at more than 100,000 in 2012 but has dropped by 3,171 since, reducing demand for goods and services. Health care is the exception, given the needs of a growing senior population.

Restraints on job growth in 2026

Several factors could slow Fairbanks' job growth this year beyond federal job and spending cuts.

Public schools across the state are struggling with declining enrollment and long-term budget instability. Since the pandemic, when enrollment dropped steeply, the Fairbanks North Star School District has closed seven schools — three last year — contributing to local government job losses that will continue this year.

Official enrollment numbers are not available yet, but the district reports a 2025-2026 decline of about 600 students. The details under those losses are telling. Fewer incoming kindergartners than outgoing high school seniors accounted for a net loss of 60 students, 368 fewer students moved into than out of the district, and 165 students switched to nondistrict homeschooling.

Difficulty finding workers could also restrict Fairbanks' growth. Like other parts of the state, Fairbanks has fewer working-age adults and a growing reliance on out-of-state workers.

Fairbanks had 6,800 fewer adults aged 18 to 64 in 2024 than at the 2012 peak, with annual losses each year except in 2021, when the Eielson buildup offset declines.

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