

# What will the Mat-Su be like in 2050?

No borough in Alaska has grown at a faster rate in the past 20 years.

## Why is everyone moving here?

Here's a hint: it's the character of the valley.

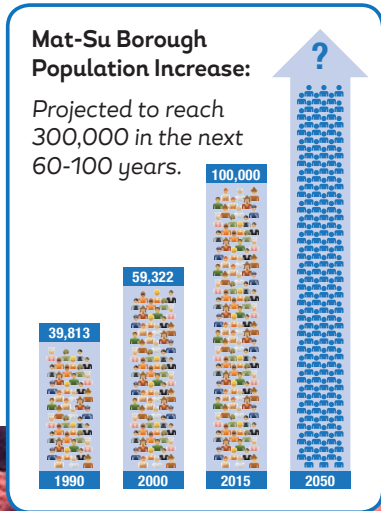
Many people have moved to the Mat-Su for the same reason the native people and later settlers did: the bounty. The first farmers literally carved their fields out of the wilderness. There are no better agricultural lands in the state and the wilderness they "tamed" is 24,000 square miles of natural diversity. Our rivers and streams are home to all five species of salmon. We have healthy populations of moose, caribou, sheep, bear, lynx, wolverine, snowshoe hare, and more. And the lakes and open spaces are pitstops for migratory birds like geese, ducks, cranes, and seabirds.

Some people move here because the Mat-Su Borough is one big outdoor playground. Miles upon miles of public land is open to hunting and fishing, hiking, snow machining, rafting, skiing—the list goes on. The glaciers and mountains are spectacular and a magnet for tourists and Alaskans.

Some people are moving to the Mat-Su because you can still afford a five-acre lot with a house and there are few municipal restrictions. Roughly 30 percent of valley residents commute to Anchorage for work. It's handy and unique to have the economic center of the state 50 minutes in one direction and Matanuska Glacier 50 minutes in the other direction.

These things all make up the character of the valley and they are attracting new residents at a clip. The Mat-Su is the fastest growing area in the state – between 2000 and 2010, the borough population increased by 58%! The forecast is for continued, steady growth. With all the people come their

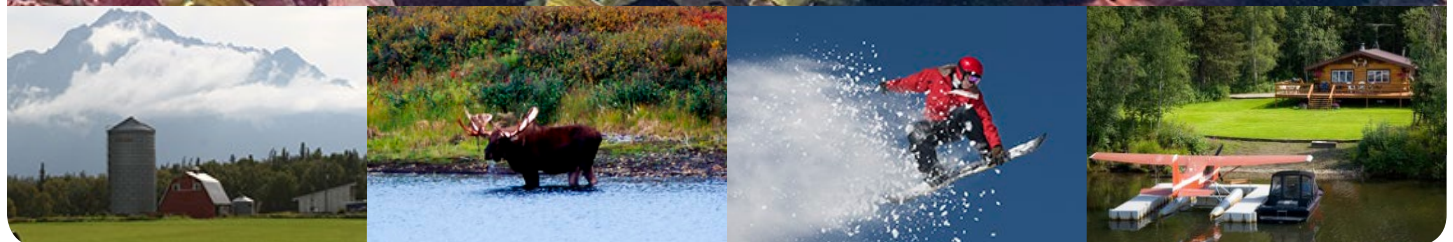
needs: schools, roads, waste and water infrastructure, maintenance services, etc. *Instead of "What will the Mat-Su be like in 2050?" perhaps we should ask this:*



## What do we want the Mat-Su to be like in 2050?



Many people move to the Mat-Su to live an outdoor lifestyle.



# What do Mat-Su Residents want?

How do we evaluate our salmon, farms, ... our freedom?



## What is a salmon stream worth?

*Or a lake, or a forest, or a view?*

Growth spurts are awkward for communities. The Mat-Su Borough is big enough to absorb the crowds, but how and at what cost? We're already struggling to build and pay for schools and roads to accommodate the growing population. From Palmer one can see farmland that has been converted into residential neighborhoods. And many of our traditional trails have either been blocked by recent development or have deteriorated from overuse.

To make good decisions about the future and to sustain the character of the valley, we first need to understand what our lands do for us and how valuable they are to our communities. Farms, fish, trails, open space and clean water provide essential benefits to residents. These are some of our **community assets** and need to be considered in land use decisions as the borough grows and changes.

So, what is a community asset worth? That's easier to determine for some assets than it is for others. Sportfishing and commercial salmon industries contribute an estimated 8,056 jobs and \$865 million to the local economy\*, so the economic value of lands with fish habitat can be partly quantified. 66% of Alaska's agricultural production comes from the valley accounting for 2,000+ jobs and bringing in \$55 million annually\*\*, so cultivated lands have a dollar value. But, what is the value of a marsh that acts as flood control and wildfire mitigation? The economic impact of tourism and recreation in the Borough has surpassed that of agriculture. Many of us make our living from sightseeing, flightseeing, lodging for tourists, river guiding, and more. How much is a viewshed worth?

**We know the value of raw land shouldn't be considered zero**, but how do you put a dollar value on it? Recent studies in the Mat-Su have undertaken to do just that.

\*2007 Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission report to the Board of Fish  
 \*\*[www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online\\_Highlights/Rankings\\_of\\_Market\\_Value/Alaska/](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Rankings_of_Market_Value/Alaska/)

### Community Assets

Providing benefits to the Mat-Su Borough

**Some land classification types are:**

- Cultivated
- Coniferous Forest
- Rivers & Lakes
- Riparian Forest
- Wetlands
- Deciduous Forest
- Mixed Forest

**Cultivated**

**Benefits:**

- Access to Local Foods
- Local Jobs/Livelihoods
- Tourism
- Open Space/
- Development Buffers
- Migratory Bird Habitat

**Rivers & Lakes**

**Benefits:**

- Drinking Water Supply
- Migration Corridor
- Migratory Bird Habitat
- Fish Habitat
- Recreation
- Scenic Views

**Wetlands**

**Benefits:**

- Water Storage
- Wildlife & Bird Habitat
- Salmon Nursery
- Water Filtration
- Flood Control
- Wildfire Mitigation

# Recent Studies in the Mat-Su

Evaluating our community assets and their impact on our quality of life

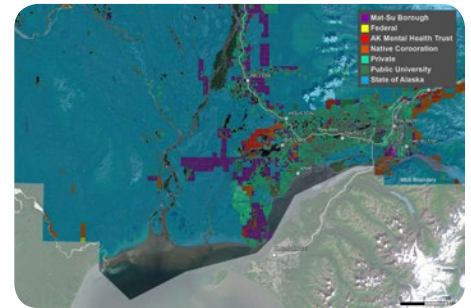
Baseline  
Data

## GIS Mapping

Where are the assets?

The first step in making informed land use decisions is to know the asset value of different land types. Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping is a computer system that can show data related to physical locations. For example, Great Land Trust, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, and the Mat-Su Borough have worked to prioritize critical habitat for fish and wildlife, wetlands that are essential to regional water quality, and wildlife and recreation corridors. GIS mapping allows us

to visualize where these are located in relation to each other and to communities, farms, and neighborhoods. We can analyze them from a 10,000 foot view or zoom in to a specific parcel. This information is essential to gain a better perspective on the benefits provided by different lands across the valley.



MSB Land Ownership



Wetlands



Lakes, Rivers and Streams



Cultivated

More information is available at [www.matsu2050.org](http://www.matsu2050.org) or [www.greatlandtrust.org](http://www.greatlandtrust.org).

Local  
Values

## Household Values Survey

What do Mat-Su residents value most?

In 2012, UAA's ISER surveyed Mat-Su residents asking what they would like their community to look like in thirty years. Focus groups in Houston, Palmer, Wasilla, Sutton, and Talkeetna helped identify land use issues for the survey. Survey recipients chose between different land use and development scenarios and were given options about how much they were willing to pay for the future they wanted. Results showed that Mat-Su residents want the future to look like the valley they know, or knew – one with fully restored salmon runs, farmland used

Willing to pay

**\$109**  
to



Restore  
salmon runs

Willing to pay

**\$97**  
to



Keep current &  
set aside more  
farmland

Willing to pay

**\$60**  
to



Expand  
recreation access

Top 3 actions residents would be willing to pay to achieve

for...farming, and access to recreation areas. It's what brought many of them here in the first place and it's what they'd like for their kids to experience.

More information is available at [www.matsu2050.org](http://www.matsu2050.org) or [iser.uaa.alaska.edu](http://iser.uaa.alaska.edu).



# Recent Studies in the Mat-Su

Evaluating our community assets and their impact on our quality of life

Local Values

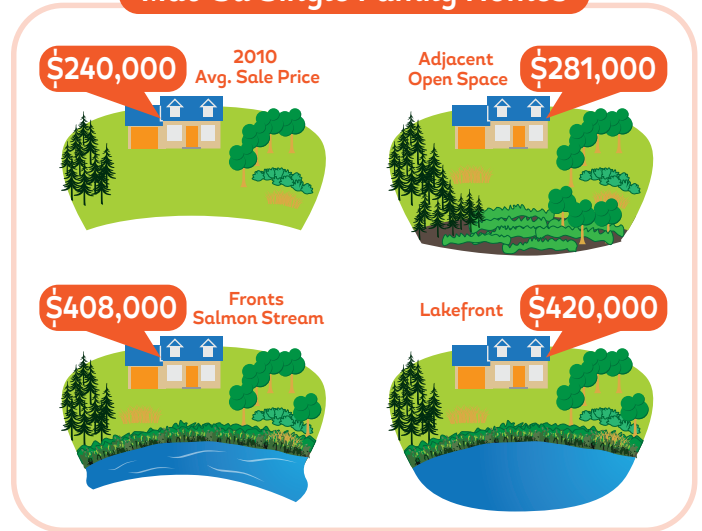
## Private Property Analysis

Lakes, streams and open spaces

The University of Alaska's Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) posed the question: **do lakes, streams and open space have a positive influence on private property values?** The short answer is, as you might suspect, yes they do, and the ISER report helps us quantify our assumptions. Bodies of water had the greatest impact: the estimated change in sales value for lakeside property was an increase of 76.4%, for salmon stream frontage it was 69.8%!

On total, the appraised value of residential property and vacant private land was approximately \$7 billion in 2011. This report estimates that almost 37% of the total was due to the influence of lakes,

### Mat-Su Single Family Homes



streams and open space – that makes Mat-Su lakes, streams and rivers a \$2.5 billion community asset!

More information is available at [www.matsu2050.org](http://www.matsu2050.org) or [iser.uaa.alaska.edu](http://iser.uaa.alaska.edu).

Local Values

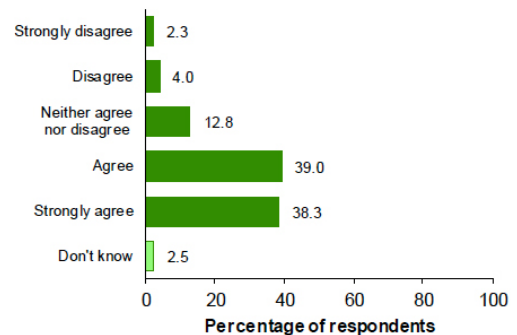
## MSB Community Survey

Attitudes toward salmon, land use, and the environment

Since 2006, the University of Alaska's Justice Center and the Mat-Su Borough (MSB) have conducted an annual survey of residents about issues like borough revenue and taxation, perceptions of crime, and use of borough services and facilities, for example. In 2014, a new series of questions was added to gauge attitudes about salmon, land use and the impact of the environment on our health.

The survey proves out that salmon are highly valued by the community. 82% of respondents agreed that salmon are important to the Mat-Su economy. The results also showed that residents believe salmon are facing long-term problems and they strongly support the protection of healthy salmon habitat. The salmon section, and indeed the whole report, is an interesting and worthwhile read on local values.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement  
**Even in difficult economic times, we should still find money to protect and manage salmon and their habitat.**



▲ Survey results are given in tables & bar graphs. Respondents were also asked for their comments. ▼

**"I am very concerned about the loss of farm land, fishing and recreational sites, and conservation of water ways in the Mat-Su Valley. My family and I hunt wild meats and prefer them and catch our own fish every year."**

More information is available at [www.matsu2050.org](http://www.matsu2050.org) or [justice.uaa.alaska.edu](http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu).



# Recent Studies in the Mat-Su

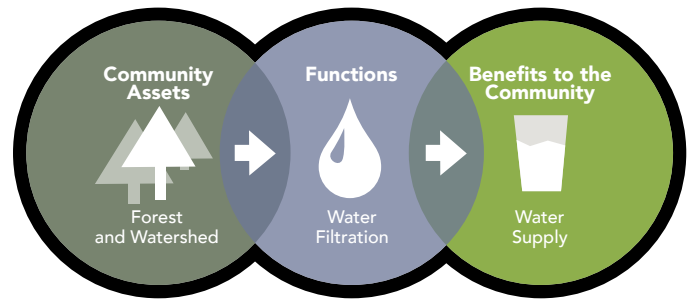
Evaluating our community assets and their impact on our quality of life

Asset  
Values

## Our Natural Economy

*It's working for us all the time*

This report uses accepted economic assessment tools to value the benefits we receive from 13 different land types in the Mat-Su Borough. The study looks at our natural resources as economic assets that benefit our community over-time like bridges and roads. For example, wetlands are nurseries for salmon, which provide a tangible boost to our economy. Wetlands also help us avoid costs because they act as sponges to moderate potential flooding, function as "free" waste treatment, and are part of our water supply system. Not only do we sit back and reap the benefits, assets like these are self-maintaining and, when managed sustainably, have longer lifespans than man-made infrastructure. Consider the cost to build, maintain, and ultimately replace, a water-



filtration plant as a substitute for naturally filtered groundwater. It's substantial and this example is just one benefit from one land type.

What's it all worth? approximately \$35 billion of direct inputs (e.g. salmon) plus avoided costs (e.g. water treatment facilities) to our economy each year, or an estimated \$1 trillion over 100 years. When these asset values are considered in land-use decisions by governments, private owners, and organizations, we all benefit.

More information is available at [www.matsu2050.org](http://www.matsu2050.org) or [www.eartheconomics.org](http://www.eartheconomics.org).

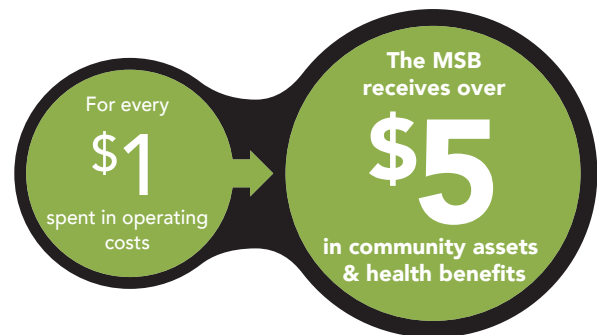
ROI  
Analysis

## Return On Investment

*Economic benefits of trails, parks, and open space*

What can a trail contribute to the economy of the Mat-Su? Think of it this way: trails lead to salmon streams, which leads to fishing, which requires the purchase of gear, and services, like food, gas, and lodging, and local guiding businesses. Call it exercise or call it going fishing, the end result is revenue for the valley and healthier living for residents.

And that's not all. Proximity to open spaces, streams and lakes increases property values. Agriculture and wild food harvests fill the larder of the locals while also adding to health benefits through the gathering as well as the eating. Fields act as fire buffers. Marshes provide flood protection. Visitors attracted to the great outdoors of the Mat-Su stay



the night and pay a bed tax. All of these add up to direct and indirect benefits to the Mat-Su Borough.

This report quantifies what we get back from our trails, parks and open spaces for every dollar we put in. In simple terms, when we spend \$1 on the trail to that salmon stream, we can look forward to \$5 in return. And that's being conservative. It's something to think about the next time funding for trails, parks and public open spaces shows up on the ballot.

More information is available at [www.matsu2050.org](http://www.matsu2050.org) or [www.eartheconomics.org](http://www.eartheconomics.org).

