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A HANDBOOK ON ALASKA REGIONALISM

For the Use of Delegates  
to the Alaska Constitutional Convention,  
College, Alaska

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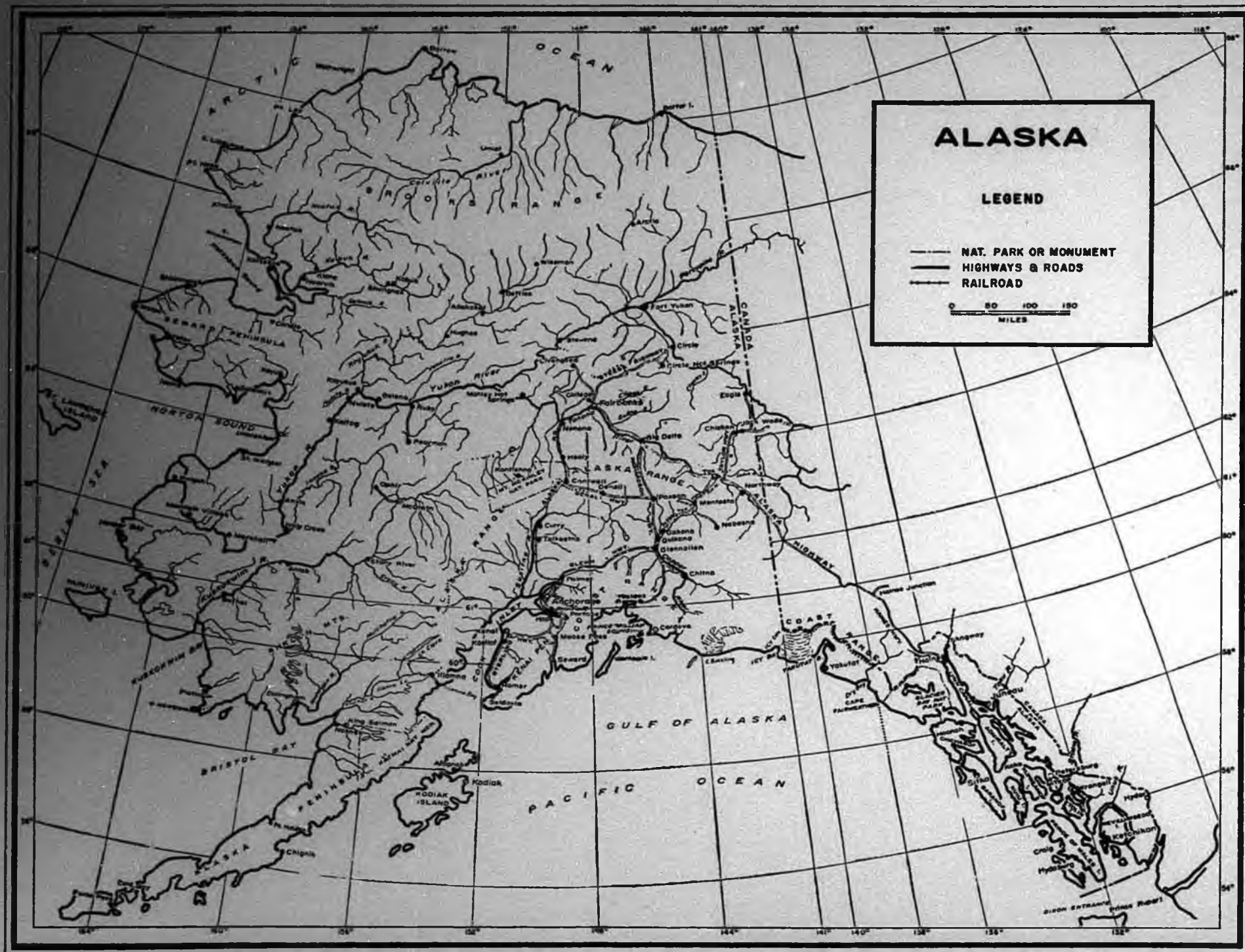
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## INTRODUCTION

This is intended as an introductory handbook of sorts to assist delegates to the Alaska Constitutional Convention in their tasks of devising systems of apportionment and local government and in determining constitutional policy in relation to natural resources management, economics and public administration.

The writer must admit to some qualms in presenting what amounts to an Alaskan guidebook for Alaskans, but two circumstances made it possible to muster the necessary nerve to carry on.

Alaska is big. Its total area of 586,400 square miles is the size of the greater part of the middle-west of the continental United States, one-fifth the total area of the forty-eight States. It stretches out between the parallels of 51 degrees and 75 degrees north and the meridians of 130 degrees west and 172 degrees east. In its extreme extent it approximates the east-west, north-south spread of the continental United States and contains four time zones within its boundaries. Its coastline is longer than that of the entire continental United States. Because of its sub-continental size, Alaska is not a single, homogeneous region but several distinctive regions, each with differing physical, climatological and natural resources features. Under these circumstances, an Alaskan residing in one region of Alaska might find some difficulty in thinking of the problems and the requirements of all of Alaska in other terms than the problems and requirements of his own region and could conceivably be in need of some key reminders of the nature of the whole of his future State.

Also, Alaska is passing through one of the most dynamic periods of change in its history. A glance at only one index of change -- population -- will indicate this. The 1939 official census reported that there were only 72,524 Alaskans, but by 1950 this number had risen to 128,643 and by 1954 to an estimated 208,000 Alaskans! There are other indicators of the great differences wrought by time upon Alaska. Average monthly employment data of the Employment Security Commission indicate, for example, that construction industries which accounted for only 11.5% of all covered employment in 1940 accounted for 38.3% in 1943 when the United States was well into World War II and 27.0% in 1954, while mining decreased from 26.4% of covered employment in 1940 to 5.6% in 1954. All of these revolutionary changes have taken place within the short space of fifteen years.

The Alaska of tomorrow promises to be as different from the Alaska of today as it is from the Alaska of yesterday. A recent authoritative forecast of the future employment pattern in Alaska predicted that by 1962 average monthly employment in construction will have dropped to 3,900 as compared with 7,404 in 1954, while employment in forest products mills will increase to about 1,800 as compared with 681 in 1954 and in addition will provide 2,030 new jobs per month in logging and 6,030 new jobs in various supporting industries. (Based upon Projections of Economic Activity in Alaska for the Period 1954-1963, Bureau of Employment Security, Washington, D. C., April 1955).

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And so Alaska presents not one but several distinct Alaskas, differing greatly in time and space. Alaska is so vast and varied, and is changing so rapidly and drastically over relatively short periods of time that the production of this "Alaskan Handbook for Alaskans" appeared to be justified.

The discussions which follow will be found to be very sketchy and incomplete. This was done consciously because the readers for whom this is prepared already have good stocks of specific and detailed factual knowledge of our Alaska. Do not expect, therefore, to find any but a very small fraction of this repeated in what follows. All that is being attempted here is to suggest a framework which may prove useful in giving perspective, more general meaning and order to this specific knowledge and to present a tool for discovering how it is all inter-related.

For purposes of dealing with the problems mentioned in the opening sentence of this introduction, it is clear that Alaska is too large to be dealt with as a single unit. Repeatedly the delegates will be confronted with the necessity of breaking Alaska down into meaningful and manageable units. The material which follows may prove of some use in suggesting several basis upon which this could be done to deal with different problems. It is divided into two main parts. The first describes Alaska in terms of its space and physical composition (i.e., its natural geographic regions and units and natural resources distribution), and the second in these terms as modified and effected by man's occupancy of the regional units (i.e., in terms of general economic regions and administrative units).

## PART I - GEOGRAPHIC UNITS AND NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRIBUTION

### Major Units - Geographic Regions

Physiographically, Alaska may be divided into three distinct major regions, varying in geologic origin and surface expression - the Pacific Mountain, Central Plateau, and Arctic Slope regions.

Geologically the Pacific Mountain Region is a continuation of the continental Pacific Mountain system which can be traced through British Columbia into Alaska. At this point, the axis changes and sends two spurs in a southwesterly direction. One spur forms the Chugach and Kenai Mountains and reappears in Kodiak Island. The main spur forms the crescent of the Alaska Range and stretches over the Alaska Peninsula into the Aleutian Islands. The valleys between and within these parallel ranges are filled by the sea or form broad valleys and intermittent basins, such as Matanuska Valley and the Copper River Basin. In most discussions, this region is described as not one, but three distinct regions: Southeastern, South Central and Southwestern Alaska.

(A) The Southeastern Alaska consisting of many islands and a strip of narrow mainland, is separated from Canada by mountains that rise sharply from the water's edge to heights of 9,000 feet, or more, through which run deep fiords and the Inside Passage. The most extensive commercially valuable stands of spruce, hemlock and cedar are located in this region. This region is highly mineralized and has extensive fisheries resources.

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(B) The South-Central Alaska coastline resembles the southeast, being well forested and possessing extensive fisheries resources. North and parallel to the coast extends the 150 mile-wide Alaska Range. Numerous mineral deposits exist in this range which culminates in Mount McKinley at 20,300 feet. Some of Alaska's highest agricultural potentials lie within this region in the Matanuska Valley, Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island and Copper River Basin. Indications of petroleum and water power potentials have aroused much interest.

(C) Southwestern Alaska for hundreds of miles along the long narrow Alaska Peninsula and the chain of Aleutian Islands are volcanoes, glaciers, and slopes with moss, grass and bush. Pribilof Islands, about 200 miles north of Unalaska, is the breeding ground of the Alaska fur seal. The Aleutians give Alaska an unusually wide spread in longitude and latitude, between the parallels of 51° and 72° North, and between the meridians of 130° West and 173° East. Bristol Bay and the great drainage basin emptying into it provide one of the world's great salmon-fishing areas.

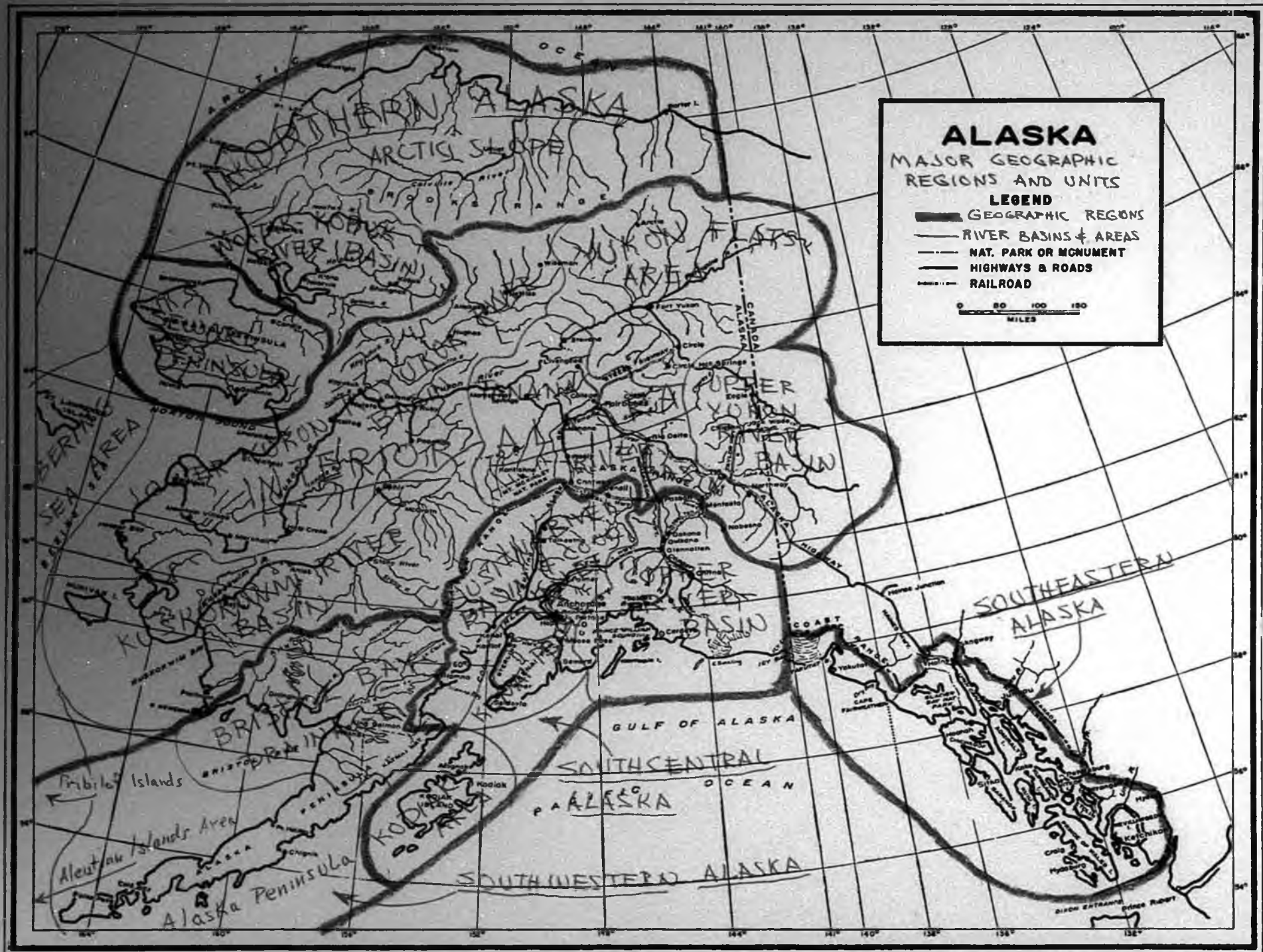
(D) Interior Alaska (Central Plateau Region) north of the crescent formed by the Alaska Range is a broad expanse of plateaus and lowlands, dotted here and there by mountain groups and drained by several large rivers, including the Yukon, Kuskokwin, Porcupine, Tanana, and Koyukuk. This central plateau continues east into the Yukon Territory and west to the Bering Sea. The subsoil over most of this area is frozen the entire year, but in some areas it is relatively fertile and offers agricultural development potentials. Tundra and wooded areas contain valuable wild life resources.

(E) The Seward Peninsula is one of Alaska's major mineralized areas.

(F) Northern Alaska includes the Arctic Slope, the land sloping gradually from the northern foothills of the Brooks Range, to the Arctic Ocean, and the Noatak and Kobuk River Basins. A number of mountain groups are in the area, and tundra country, consisting of large areas of rolling uplands and coastal plains, stretches northward from the Brooks Range. Petroleum and natural gas has recently attracted attention to this region.

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Other Main Units -- River Basins and Geographic Areas

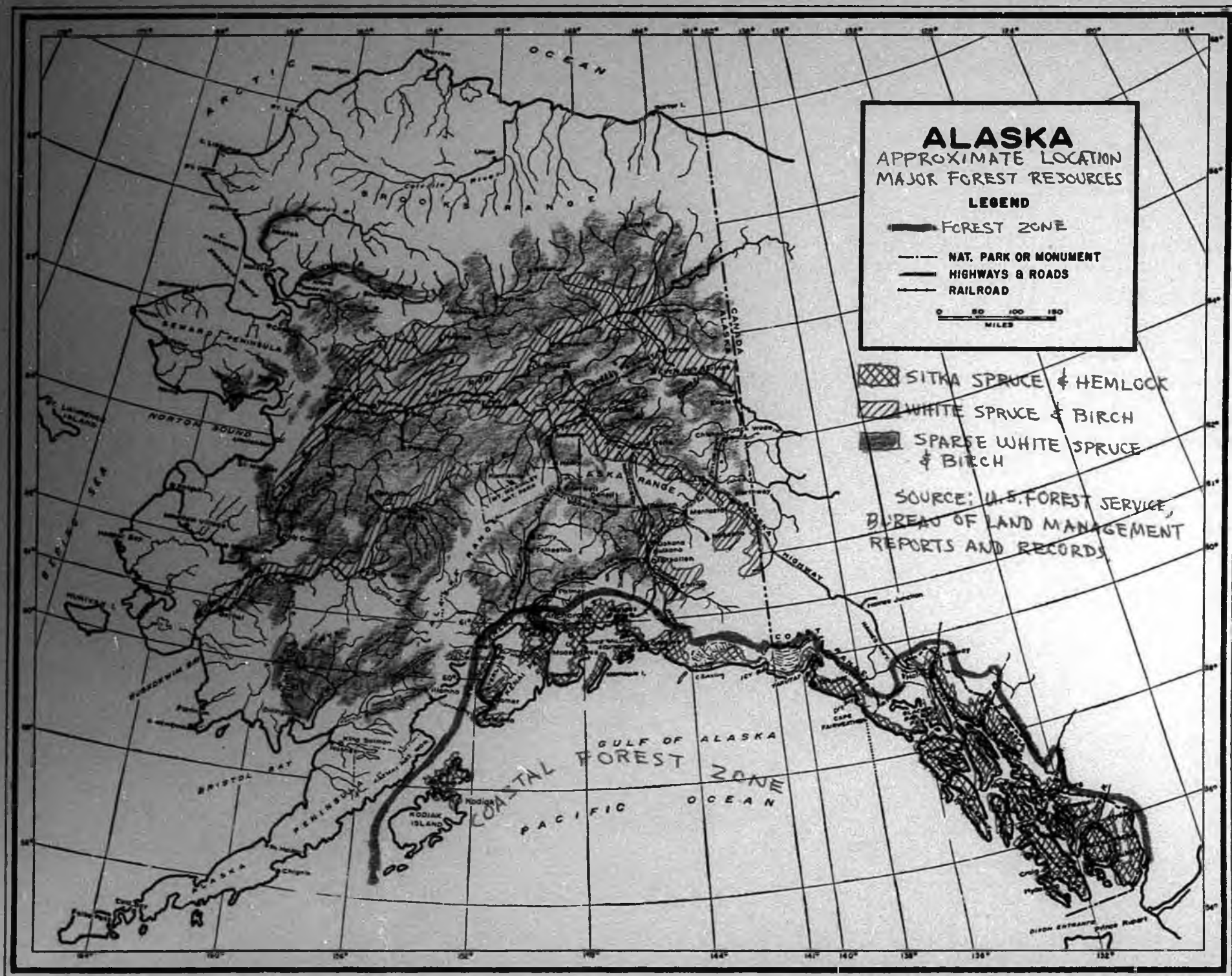
The major geographic regions described above readily divide into further geographic units on the basis of the boundaries of the major river or drainage basins (e.g. Copper River Basin, Kuskokwin River Basin, etc.) or major geographic features (e.g. Seward Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, Southeastern Alaska, etc.). The enclosed map of major river basin and geographic areas indicating the approximate boundaries of these units is a composite of the basins and areas as used in the studies of the U. S. Bureau of Mines, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps of Engineers.

Natural Resources Distribution

Another set of natural factors which will have to be taken into consideration in determining units to be used in dividing Alaska is the pattern of natural resources distribution. Although they will not suggest the boundaries of such units, natural resources occurrences do provide the focuses around which the socio-economic regions and units of Alaska have or will develop. The approximate distribution pattern of only two commercially important resources -- forest species and mineral occurrences -- have been illustrated here. The map illustrating the fur and commercial fisheries management units will serve to illustrate the general pattern of these important resources.

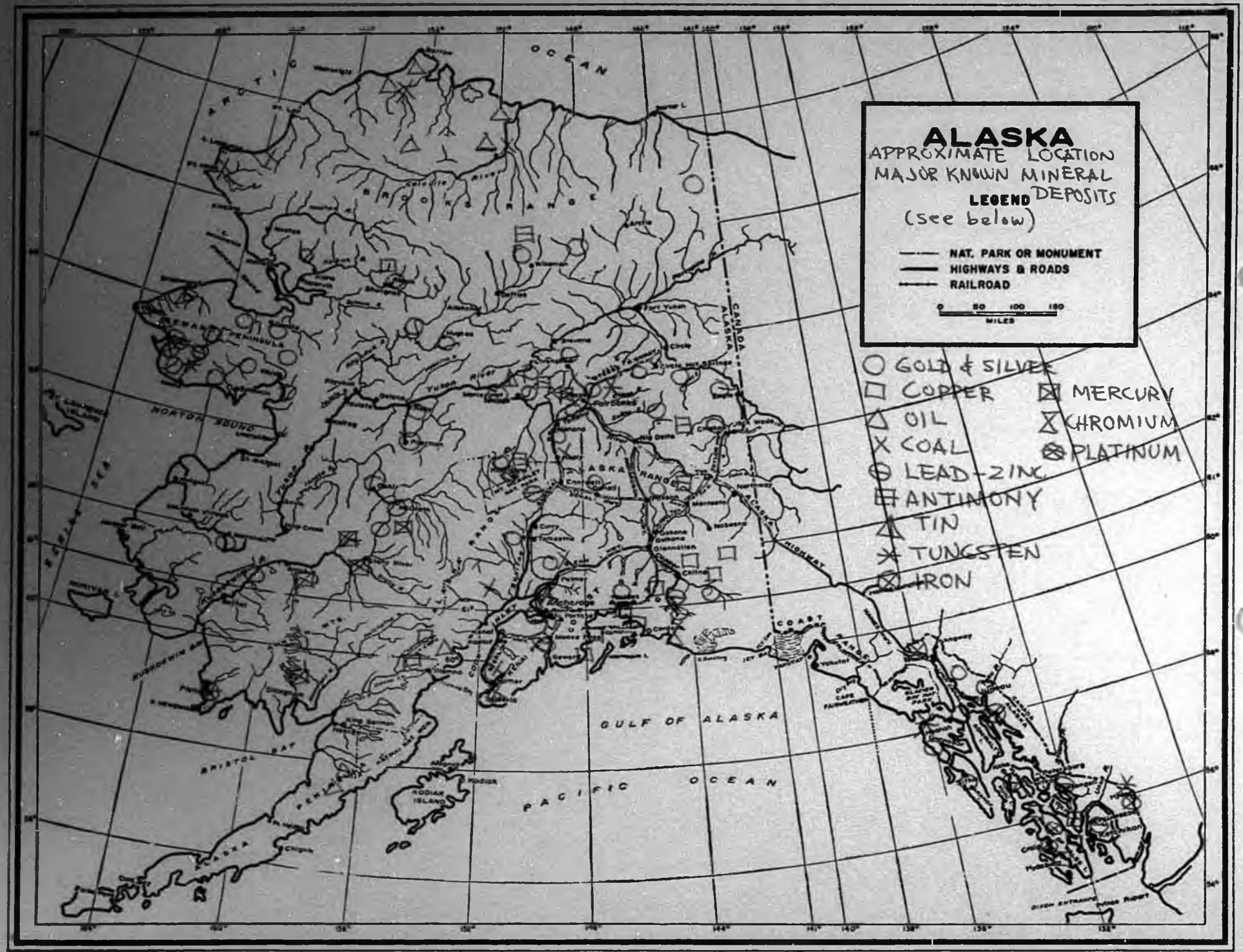
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PART II - SOCIO-ECONOMIC REGIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

Major Socio-Economic Regions

The task of dividing Alaska into meaningful socio-economic regions begins with the regions of the geographer who presented us with not one, but six different and well defined "Alaskas." But the addition of certain strong "cultural features" -- a railroad, a highway network and an integrated system of defense facilities -- justifies some modification of the geographic divisions to present a more logical division for considering Alaska economic and cultural characteristics. The effects of this combination of geographic and cultural features suggests that the largest meaningful division of Alaska is into three socio-economic regions.

(1) Southeastern Alaska which is identical with the geographer's regional unit, is the easiest to define, being separated from the rest of Alaska by Canadian territory and the impenetrable barrier of the great Malaspina Glacier and the towering St. Elias Range. It also exhibits the highest degree of regional unity in physical features, natural resources, population composition and economic development.

(2) Central and Interior Alaska comprises the geographer's South Central Alaska and the eastern part of his Interior Alaska, roughly that portion east of meridian of longitude 151 degrees west. This region is composed of Cook Inlet and its tributaries, Kodiak Island, the Copper River Basin, the Susitna River Basin, the Tanana River Basin and the upper Yukon River Basin. The natural barriers of the Alaska Range and the boundaries of the several river basins within the region have been penetrated by the Alaska Railroad and the highway network. With the exception of Kodiak Island, the principal centers and many of the minor centers of development and population are laced together by roads, many of them paved and of high standard. Giving further economic unity to the region is the military "defense heartland" concept which has dictated the location and nature of the principal defense establishments in Alaska and tied them all together in this single region stretching from Kodiak on the south, northward to Fairbanks and eastward to Big Delta.

(3) Northern and Western Alaska is simply what remains of the Territory. It comprises Southwestern Alaska, the western and lower half of Interior Alaska, Seward Peninsula and the Arctic Slope. This region does not tie together well as a unit. Southwestern Alaska, for example, which embraces the important salmon fisheries of Bristol Bay, the fur seal resources of the Fribilof Islands and the installations of the Alaska (17th) Naval District in the Aleutian Islands, and contains the largest concentration of the region's population (about one third of the regions' 1950 population) probably is entitled to receive separate consideration.

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### Population Characteristics of the Regions

Population characteristics are a product of many factors, chief among them being geographic and economic factors. An examination of certain of the general population characteristics of these three regions as reported by the 1950 census, therefore, provides interesting clues as to the probably economic and cultural differences of the three regions. (See Table following)

The Central and Interior region showed the greatest population expansion between 1939 and 1950, a whopping 204.7% increase as compared with an 11.7% increase in Southeastern Alaska and a 21.8% increase in Northern and Western Alaska. This region also contained the largest concentration of military population (eighty percent of the total military personnel in Alaska, not including dependents), which comprised 22.7% of its total population, and the lowest number and proportion of indigenous races (some 8.5% of its total population).

Northern and Western Alaska contained the largest concentration of Native races (58.7% of the Territory's Native peoples) comprising 68.4% of its total population. This was also the least urbanized region, only seven percent of the total civilian population residing in places of 1,000 or more.

Southeastern Alaska showed the smallest relative increase in population between 1939 and 1950 (11.7%), had the lowest proportion of military to total population (2.3%) and was the most urbanized region, 65.8% of its civilian population residing in places of 1,000 persons or more.

### Economic Structure of the Regions

It is not possible to present anything resembling a Territorial or regional "gross product" to illustrate the nature and structure of the three major Alaskan economies, but a picture can be presented of the structure of the basic economy in each case, that dynamic portion of the total which ultimately determines the level of total income and production. The table which follows analyses those industries which are not dependent upon other industries for their existence -- those based upon the extraction and processing of natural resources and Federal construction, tourism and other activities which introduce new income from outside sources into the regional economies. The secondary superstructure of retail and wholesale trades, services, finance, etc. which is a direct function of the income generated by these basic activities, cannot be presented because of statistical limitations.

For this analysis, the five year period 1949 through 1953 has been selected as being the most internally consistent recent period of time, and a period in which the external forces which react upon and shape the Alaskan economies were most consistent and constant in the nature, direction and intensity of their impact. The exclusion of 1954 is due in part to lack of complete data, but more importantly because this was another year of important transition between the immediate past and the future, and hence a year in which statistical series would not be wholly comparable or comparable without considerable further interpretation and study.

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GENERAL POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

BY ECONOMIC REGIONS

1950 CENSUS

	ECONOMIC REGIONS						TOTAL ALL ALASKA	
	SOUTHEASTERN		CENTRAL & INTERIOR		NORTHERN & WESTERN		No. Persons	%
	No. Persons	%	No. Persons	%	No. Persons	%		
Total Population - 1939	25241	-	23427	-	23856	-	72524	-
Total Population - 1950	28203		71389		29051		128643	
% increase	11.7		204.7		21.8		77.4	
<u>MILITARY-CIVILIAN</u>								
Military population	660	2.3	16236	22.7	3511	12.1	20407	15.9
Civilian population	27543	97.7	55153	77.3	25540	87.9	108236	84.1
<u>RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS</u>								
White Race	19655	69.7	64095	89.7	9033	31.1	92783	72.1
Indigenous Races (Natives)	7929	28.1	6085	8.5	19870	68.4	33884	26.4
Other Races	619	2.2	1209	1.8	148	0.5	1976	1.5
<u>URBAN-RURAL</u>								
Civilian population * residing								
in: (1) places of 1,000 or more	18130	65.8	30980**	56.1**	1800	7.1	50910	39.0
(2) places of less than 1,000	9413	34.2	24173	43.9	23740	92.9	57326	53.0

\* Elimination of military in places of 1,000 estimated in some cases

\*\* Includes all places in the immediate environs of the City of Fairbanks.

SOURCE: 1950 Census reports.

Some explanation is probably necessary concerning the value items which have been combined in this tabulation. For example, furs are listed at their raw fur value to the trapper while commercial fisheries products are listed not at the raw fish price paid to the fisherman (which would be directly comparable value), but at the value of the products as prepared for market. This choice of values was dictated by the fact that practically no processing of raw furs, other than for home use, takes place in Alaska while virtually all processing of fisheries products and their preparation for markets takes place within the Territory. Similar considerations dictated the choice of values in other cases. Except for commercial fisheries and forest products, value added to natural resources products by manufacturing in Alaska is negligible and no attempt has been made to segregate manufacturing as a category.

For the construction industry, wages paid rather than total value of construction was used. Most equipment, supplies and materials for construction projects were purchased outside and shipped into Alaska by the contractors, and, therefore, were not considered as having any direct impact upon the Alaskan economic regions. In cases where native Alaskan materials were used, their value is already accounted for in the forest products, mineral products and agricultural products categories, and the use of total construction values in these cases would have resulted in double counting. Wages paid was therefore settled upon as being the significant part of construction value for purposes of this analysis.

Central and Interior Alaska has the highest level basic economy, being almost twice the level of the basic economy of Southeastern Alaska and slightly more than three times that of Northern and Western Alaska. On the other hand, almost half of this is attributable to money interjected into the regional income stream from sources outside the region (tourist expenditures and construction wages), while in the case of Southeastern Alaska only sixteen percent came from outside sources and in Northern and Western Alaska twenty one percent.

Southeastern Alaska reveals the greatest dependence upon the products derived from natural resources within the region, 84% of its basic economy being represented by these values as compared with fifty percent in Central and Interior Alaska and 78.9% in Northern and Western Alaska. The prospects for substantial and immediate expansion in the forest products category in Southeastern Alaska have already been mentioned. These increases had not begun to make themselves felt until well into the calendar year 1954 and, therefore, are not reflected in this comparison.

The table does not reveal that Southwestern Alaska (the Alaska Peninsula, Bristol Bay, Aleutian and Pribilof Islands) accounts for the largest part of the basic income and values of the entire Northern and Western Alaska region. All of the commercial fisheries products (49% of the total basic economy), all of the Pribilof fur seal products (8.3%) and a very large portion of construction wages are accounted for in this sub-region. Most of the mining production of the region is located in the Nome area and the Seward Peninsula.

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## BASIC ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF ALASKA'S MAJOR REGIONS (Annual Average Basic Income & Values produced 1948-1953 Incl.)

	ECONOMIC REGIONS						TOTAL ALL ALASKA	
	Southeastern		Central & Interior		Northern & Western		Thous.	%
	Thous. \$	%	Thous. \$	%	Thous. \$	%	Thous.	%
<b>FISH &amp; WILDLIFE PRODUCTS</b>								
Commercial fisheries (Whlse value)	\$40,307	72.8%	\$31,984	29.0%	\$17,566	49.0%	\$89,857	73%
Furs (raw value)	842	1.5	594	0.5	3,239	9.0	4,675	2.3
Other tangible wildlife values*	1,135	2.1	4,600	4.2	2,315	6.5	8,050	4.0
Sub Total	42,284	76.4	37,178	33.7	23,120	64.5	102,532	51.0
<b>MINERAL PRODUCTION</b>								
(Incl. value sand, gravel & bldg. stone)	51	0.1	15,067	13.7	5,108	14.2	20,236	10.1
<b>FOREST PRODUCTS**</b>								
(value f.o.b. mill)	3,789	6.8	1,761	1.6	25	0.1	5,575	2.8
<b>AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS</b>								
(incl. est. value home consumption)	360	0.7	1,840	1.7	39	0.1	2,239	1.1
<u>NAT. RES. PROD.</u>	46,494	84.0	55,846	50.7	28,292	78.9	130,632	65.0
<u>TOURIST EXPENDITURE</u>	3,900	7.0	2,341	2.1	95	0.2	6,336	3.1
<b>CONSTRUCTION**</b>								
(wages paid)	5,000	9.0	51,800	47.2	7,500	20.9	64,300	31.9
<u>TOTAL BASIC ECONOMY</u>	55,394	100.0	109,987	100.0	35,887	100.0	201,268	100.0

FOOTNOTES AND SOURCES: See Next Page



FOOTNOTES - BASIC ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF ALASKA'S MAJOR REGIONS

- \*.....Includes Expenditures by non-resident sportsmen as reported for fiscal year 1952 and minimum food value of take by resident hunters and native peoples, value of reindeer and ivory, as computed from regular annual reports of F.W.S. and A.N.S.
- \*\*.....Does not reflect operation of pulp mill which started production in 1954 and only partially reflects operations of new plywood mill.
- \*\*\*.....Regional allocation of wages on basis of geographic distribution of total value of construction.

SOURCES - BASIC ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF ALASKA'S MAJOR REGIONS

Commercial Fisheries Products total and regional values from the annual statistical digests of the Fish and Wildlife Service ("Alaska Fisheries and Fur Seal Industries"); Furs, land furs from Fish and Wildlife Service game and fur district records; Fribilof Fur Seal net proceeds transferred to General Fund report by U. S. Treasury Dept. in Combined Statement of Receipts, Expenditures and Balances of the U. S. Government; Other tangible wildlife values estimated from data in Wildlife in the Economy of Alaska, by John Buckley, Univ. of Alaska, February 1955, and Alaska Native Service estimates of amount of wildlife products consumed and value of products; Mineral Production total from Bureau of Mines annual area reports ("Mineral Production in Alaska"), regional breakdown prepared by Territorial Department of Mines from basic records; Forest products total and regional values estimated on basis of Forest Service reports of physical volume of lumber produced (cited in Alaska Development Board 1953-55 Report, page 39), Bureau of Land Management reports on timber cut on public domain lands (cited in Annual reports of the Governor of Alaska) and average price of lumber f.o.b. mill (ibid), free use timber valued arbitrarily at \$10 thousand board foot; Agricultural products total and regional values from 1950 U. S. Census of Agriculture, V. I-pt. 34.1, "Agricultural Production, Alaska ---1953," Alaska Agricultural Experiment Station, Palmer, Alaska and annual reports of Governor of Alaska; Tourist Expenditures estimated on basis of average annual "touristry revenue" for years 1951-1953 as computed in A Recreation Program for Alaska, National Park Service, 1955. pp. 27-29 and regional breakdown from data contained in Analysis of Alaska Travel with Special Reference to Tourists, W. J. Stanton, U. S. National Park Service, 1953; Construction wages total from Employment Security Commission annual reports to the Governor of Alaska, regional breakdown on basis of location of work as indicated in "Construction Contracts Awarded in Alaska, 1947-52," Seattle First National Bank, October 14, 1953, "Value of Building Permits in Alaska, 1949-53," Alaska Development Board and miscellaneous news items.

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### Communications - Surface Transportation

All regional concepts are closely allied to the communications phenomenon, and the three major regions described here show certain important variations in this regard. All have been served well by the airplane, but surface communications differ greatly. Because of its terrain, Southeastern Alaska is most heavily dependent on coastal shipping services for intra-regional transportation as well as for connection to the States. Development of an inter-connected system of roads or other land transportation facilities would be most difficult and costly and would require frequent ferry connections. The continental road systems touch this region only by means of the Haines Cutoff at the north end, and just outside the Alaska boundary on the south end at Prince Rupert, British Columbia.

Surface transportation facilities are best developed in the Central-Interior Region. The highway system links together all of the major centers except Kodiak and Cordova, and plans are advanced for the connection of the port of Cordova and the Katalla district to the system. The highways of the region are all connected with the Canadian and continental United States systems by means of the Alaska Highway. The primary highways are improved and surfaced and the secondary roads are of fairly high standard. Finally, the Alaska Railroad extends northward from the ports of Seward, Whittier and Anchorage to Fairbanks and the Interior. River boat services further supplement the railroad and road systems.

In the Northern and Western region there are a very few scattered low standard roads serving local industrial development, but no interconnected system. Transportation by ocean vessels and river boats is restricted to a very limited season (not more than four months). Air travel has increasingly replaced the traditional forms of winter surface travel by dog team. The problem of isolation are, therefore, greatest in this region.

### Determining Other Socio-economic Units

The three main regions presented above represent the largest meaningful division of Alaska. The use of anything larger would necessitate the combination of too many unlike characteristics and factors. On the other hand, these regions are too large for the purposes which are the concern of this Convention.

The above discussion of the population, economic, and surface transportation of these three major socio-economic regions of Alaska can serve as an essential preliminary to this task of determining the most appropriate smaller regional units or "building blocks" to be used in any system of apportionment, local government or public administration. For the units which the delegates will be seeking are not merely an expression of geographic or physical forces and characteristics, but more importantly represent a composite phenomenon resulting from general cultural, social, political and economic forces as they react upon each other. In other words, the regional units to be devised should represent a form of social organization which facilitates democratic processes, the communication of ideas and interests, and the achievement of socially defined purposes.

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The above deliniation of the social pattern as represented by population characteristics, the economic pattern as represented by the structure of the basic economy, and the communications phenomenon as represented by surface travel, indicates how drastically the three regions differ one from the other. It also suggests that the units finally devised to best meet the requirements of areas within each of these main regions will likewise differ drastically.

#### Existing Administrative Units

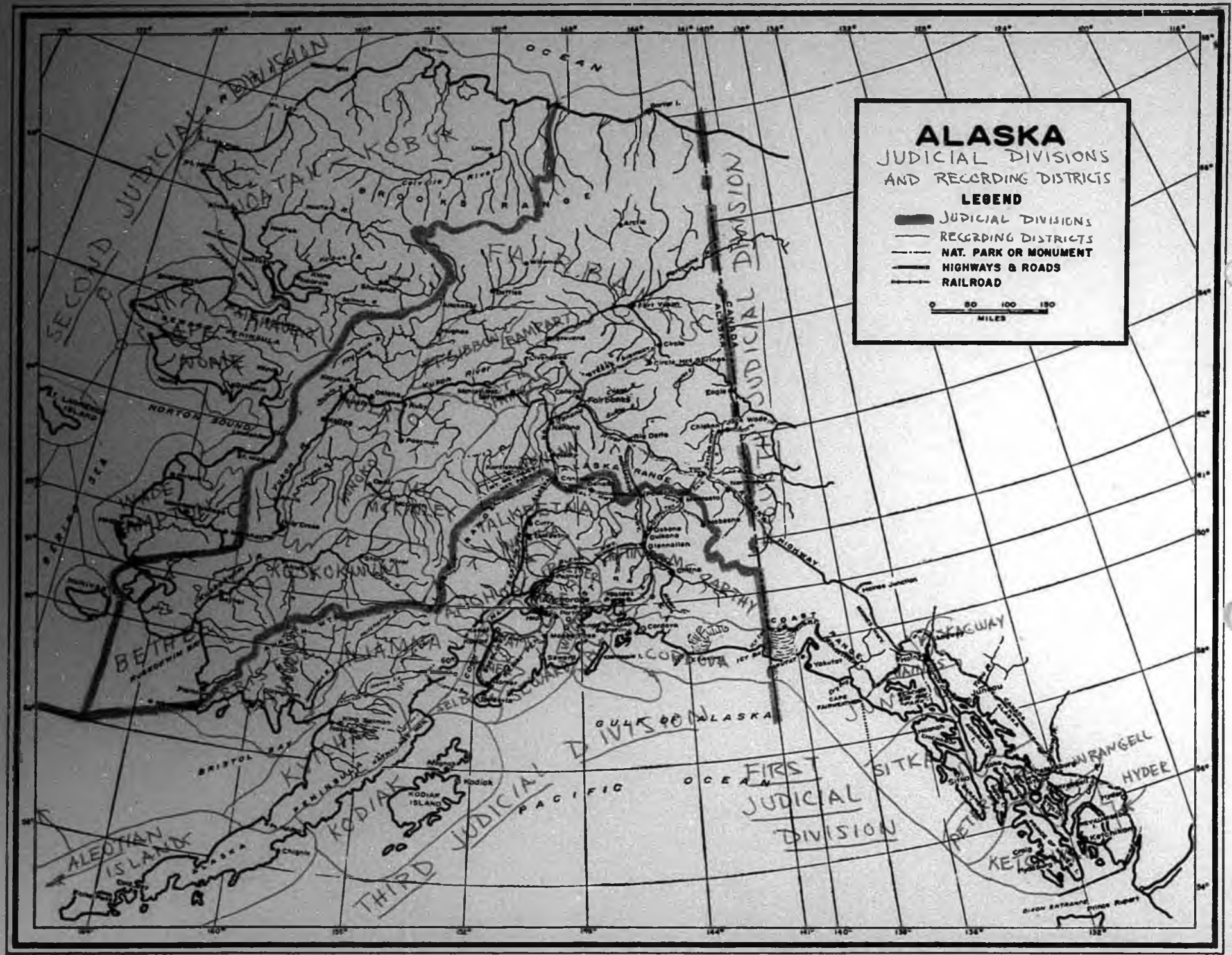
Existing regional units used for political and administrative purposes must also be recognized and taken into consideration in the determining of other units. Although Alaska does not have any political subdivisions such as counties, it has four judicial divisions which are in turn broken down into recording districts or precincts. These recording districts have also served as census districts and as basic regional units for other statistical purposes. In meeting the purposes with which the Constitutional Delegates are going to be concerned, these units have the advantages of legal definition of boundaries, local recognition and understanding, long useage for a number of different purposes, etc. Unfortunately, they also have certain shortcomings. Although the boundaries are legally defined, they are also subject to change. This has proved most troublesome in the past particularly in connection with the utility of statistical series such as census data. In some cases the boundaries violate natural geographic regions and otherwise appear to have little basis in logic. The Fairbanks Recording District in particular is an example of all of these shortcomings. Federal and Territorial agencies concerned with the management of natural resources have found it necessary to devise administrative units for the desirable decentralization of their tasks. In addition to being a reflection of the pattern of distribution of the resource in question, these units represent attempts to weigh such other important factors as communications, administrative control, relative economic and social values of different resource groupings, etc. Only two sets of such administrative and management units have been depicted by maps here -- the forest management zones of the Bureau of Land Management and the fur districts and commercial fisheries regulatory areas of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The definitive work on regions and districts in Alaska has been prepared by the U. S. Bureau of Mines in the development of its system of standardized definitions and names for use in its statistical and economic studies of the mineral industry. (Names and Definitions of Regions, Districts, and Sub-districts in Alaska, by Alfred L. Mansome and William H. Kerns, Bureau of Mines Information Circular 7679, May 1954.) Although intended primarily for purposes of providing historical continuity in mining statistics, it could have wider application, particularly at its regional and district unit level. A study of this work is highly recommended to the delegates.

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