

Houston, Alaska



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The City of Houston is located on the George Parks Highway along the Little Susitna River. Houston is 18 miles north-west of Wasilla and 57 road miles north of Anchorage. The area encompasses 22.4 sq. miles of land and 1.2 sq. miles of water.

The City of Houston (Houston) was incorporated in 1966 as a third-class city and re-classified as a second-class city in 1973. Houston's estimated population in 2008 was 2,018 which is more than double from the recorded 697 residents in 1990.

The City's origins are due to the use of Herning Trail (now Willow Creek Sled Trail) for freighting supplies to the Willow Creek Mining District. "Houston Siding" was first listed on a blueprint map of the Alaska Railroad in 1917; it was named after Congressman Houston of Tennessee and the name endured for the area.

Several coal mines were developed in the area during 1917-18. A railroad spur was constructed to the Janios & Athens Coal Mine which supplied coal to Anchorage and the LaTouche Mining Co. in Prince William Sound. The quality of the coal found in Houston was used extensively by the U.S. Navy through World War II after which the mines shut down. In the mid-1920s, the Heaven brothers operated a mink farm at mile 59.6. In 1953-54, gravel roads and power lines were extended west of Wasilla and Houston was quickly settled.

In 1998 tests were conducted for the availability, quantity and quality of natural gas in the area. Huge deposits of shallow (less than 5000 feet), coal-bed methane were discovered. The wells were capped due to local restrictions and a lack of marketing. Discussions of utilizing the gas to sell through Enstar or sell it to MEA for a gas-fired electrical generation plant were unsuccessful. MEA had already entered into an agreement to buy all of its power from Chugach Electric Association.

Popular recreation sites include the Little Su Campground, Twin/Long Lake, Cheri Lake, Prator Lake, Loon Lake, Woody Lake, Zero Lake, Bear Paw Lake, and Birch Lake. Trails for hiking and ATVs crisscross most of Houston. Many either lead toward the Hatcher's Pass Recreation Area or to the trail systems along the Big Su River from Big Lake to Willow which are most popular during winter months for dog mushers and snowmachiners. During the summer months, a water trail is popular in the Nancy Lakes region. Annual events include the Pike Derby, sponsored by the

Houston Chamber of Commerce during the winter months and Founder's Day, a community celebration boasting live entertainment, food and craft vendors, activities for the whole family and a fireworks display.

Houston has several community organizations such as Mid-Valley Seniors, The Homesteaders Community Center, Susitna Rotary, Houston Lions, and the Houston Chamber of Commerce. Elementary students attend Big Lake and Willow schools. The Houston High School and Middle School serve students from the surrounding area. Residents are employed in the nearby Wasilla/Palmer area with some commuting to Anchorage and the North Slope. Since Houston is a popular fishing and recreation center for the Little Susitna River and area lakes, several businesses provide hospitality services. Two residents hold commercial fishing permits.

Transportation into Houston includes the George Parks Highway and the Alaska Railroad. Air services are available at Anchorage International Airport for large commercial flights, and Black Spruce Airport (Runways: 1), Gus Landing Airport (Runways: 1), Reids Landing Airport (Runways: 1), Satterbergs Airport (Runways: 1), and Morvro Lake Seaplane Base. The average daily traffic count along the George Parks Highway at Houston is 19,000 vehicles as measured by AKDOT & PF.

January temperatures range from -33 to 33 while July temperatures range from 42 to 83. The average annual rainfall is 15 inches of precipitation, mostly gained from mid-July through the first-half of September, and 45 inches of snow. Winds are frequently lower than the Palmer/Wasilla area with daily averages ranging from less than 1 mph to 6 mph.

60% of residents have individual wells, septic tanks and complete plumbing. The school uses its own well water system. The remainder haul water and use outhouses. The Borough landfill in Big Lake is used.