

# DOF Daily WildFire Update

July 2, 2021

## 2021 Alaska Wildland Fire Numbers

As of Friday, July 2



- **Number of wildfires to date: 278**
- **Estimated acres burned statewide to date: 83,300**
- **New fires yesterday: 5**
- **Current active fires: 61**
- **Current number of staffed fires: 3**
- **Personnel assigned to fires: 213**
- **Human-caused fires to date: 179**
- **Lightning-caused fires to date: 84**
- **Natural-caused fires to date: 5**
- **Undetermined fire causes to date: 10**



The Munson Creek Fire on Thursday afternoon, July 1, 2021. Tony Chapman/BLM Alaska Fire Service Air Attack

### Munson Creek Fire

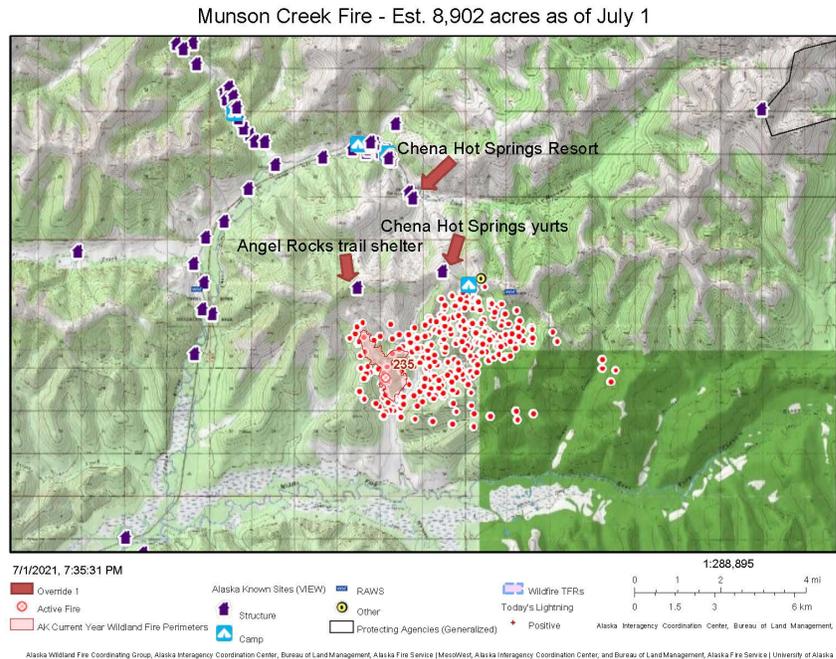
- Hot weather and winds produced a dramatic increase in fire growth and behavior on the Munson Creek Fire east of Fairbanks and south of Chena Hot Springs on Thursday. Pushed by south winds early in the afternoon, the fire grew exponentially, expanding from an estimated 500 acres to almost 9,000 acres and exhibited extreme fire behavior, including crowning, running and spotting. At the recommendation of fire managers from the Division of Forestry, the Fairbanks North Star Borough issued a "Set" evacuation advisory for cabin and homeowners at the end of Chena Hot Springs Road and for



staff and guests at Chena Hot Springs Resort. A “Set” evacuation advisory means that people should be prepared to leave their homes at a moment’s notice.

- The fire crossed a ridgeline about 2 miles south of Chena Hot Springs early Friday afternoon and firefighters have fallen back to set up protection measures around structures at Chena Hot Springs Resort and cabins and homes at the end of Chena Hot Springs.

- Firefighters are setting up hose lines and sprinklers around structures at Chena Hot Springs and private cabins and homes at the end of Chena Hot Springs Road in the event the fire threatens them. Sprinklers were set up around two yurts that are part of the resort and are located about 2 miles south of the hot springs.



- Firefighters had been successful in holding the fire south of an east-west ridgeline about 2 miles south of Chena Hot Springs on Thursday with water and retardant drops but the winds and increased fire behavior today pushed fire north toward the ridgeline and made it unsafe for firefighters to engage the fire on the ridgeline.
- The approximately 100 firefighters working on the fire are not only being challenged by unfavorable winds but also limited visibility due to heavy smoke. Helicopters are dropping water on the fire along the ridgetop.
- The fire is currently estimated at 8,900 acres but smoke and fire activity have made getting an accurate perimeter map a challenge. The fire is likely somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 acres.
- A “Set” evacuation notice remains in effect for residents living east of Mile 48 Chena Hot Springs Road and guests at Chena Hot Springs Resort has been issued by the Fairbanks North Star Borough office of Emergency Services. A “Set” evacuation notice means residents should have their bags and important items packed and be ready to leave their homes immediately if necessary. The evacuation notice will be re-evaluated daily based on fire activity and weather.
- Due to the increased fire activity, Alaska State Parks has closed all state facilities east of 48 Mile Chena Hot Springs Road including cabins, campgrounds and trails.

## Other wildfire activity

- Fairbanks Area Forestry did respond to a plane crash in the North Pole area to ensure a fire at the crash site did not spread to the wildlands. All four occupants of the plane survived the crash and the Fairbanks Area Forestry helicopter dropped water on the burning plane to prevent the fire from spreading to the wildlands.
- Fairbanks Area Forestry also responded to a structure fire in Two Rivers, about 25 miles east of Fairbanks on Friday morning due to concerns the fire could spread to the wildlands. The Fairbanks Area helicopter was enroute to the Munson Creek Fire when it spotted and reported the structure fire. The Two Rivers community is not in a fire service area and Alaska State Troopers requested that Forestry respond to ensure the fire didn't spread to the woods. The Fairbanks helicopter dropped water on the structure fire (picture at right) and the surrounding area to prevent it from spreading.



## Weather

- Another hot, dry day for the Interior with temperatures climbing into the mid-80s and relative humidities in the 20-30% range. South winds are forecast, which could present challenges for firefighters on the Munson Creek Fire who are trying to hold the fire south of a ridgetop south of the Chena Hot Springs.
- A Red Flag Warning has been issued today until 10 p.m. for the Middle Tanana Valley, Central Interior, Upper Yukon Flats and Fortymile Country, Deltana and Tanana Flats, eastern Alaska Range and Denali due to hot, dry and windy weather. Predicted weather in these areas includes 76-91 degree temperatures, humidity levels between 16-32%; and gusty, south winds.
- A low-pressure system is forecast to push the current high-pressure ridge eastward on Friday, which should bring cooler temperatures, cloud cover, higher relative humidity and a chance of rain showers this weekend. The ridge will get pushed further east early next week, increasing chances for precipitation.

## Drone incursion

- The Federal Aviation Administration has contacted the Division of Forestry regarding a drone incursion in the air space over the Brock Road Fire during initial attack operations on that fire on June 26. A drone was sighted in the air space over the fire by a pilot from one of the water-scooping aircraft and the pilot reported a near miss with the drone because it was within 500 feet of his aircraft. The FAA contacted DOF air attack personnel with footage of the drone and has been in touch with the drone

operator as part of its investigation. The drone operator is not the same individual who reported the fire while he was flying a drone.

## **Fire Restrictions**

- A burn suspension is currently in effect through the weekend for the Delta Junction, Fairbanks and Tok Areas prohibiting brush burning and the use of burn barrels. Small campfires are still allowed but DOF stresses vigilance and proper extinguishment for anyone using a campfire.
- DOF is coordinating with the Fairbanks North Star Borough and State Fire Marshal's office in regards to a possible ban on the sale and use of fireworks in the Fairbanks North Star Borough through the Fourth of July weekend. Conversations are ongoing at this time.

## **Fire danger/potential**

- The main area of wildfire concern in Alaska remains the central and eastern Interior and Upper Yukon Flats. Those areas have experienced a long stretch of hot, dry and windy weather that continues to dry out the deeper fuels that make wildfires more resistant to control. Both the Build-Up Index and Duff Moisture Code, which are indicators of deeper drying, are increasing in those areas.
- The Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group will meet on July 7 to consider converting some lands that are in Modified protection status to Limited protection. Conversion date in Alaska is typically July 10 – though it can be pushed back depending on fire activity and potential - and is a sign that the Alaska fire season has reached its peak and the potential for large wildfires is declining. In preparation for the AWFCG meeting on July 7 to discuss conversion date in Alaska, DOF Area fire management officers will be reaching out to their respective jurisdictional representatives to discuss any concerns they may have with conversion. As part of the conversion date discussion/decision, Alaska Interagency Coordination Center Fire Behavior Analyst Chris Moore and AICC fire weather staff will be presenting a seasonal briefing on July 6 to discuss current and projected fire indices and the long-range fire weather forecast to provide fire managers with the most current science and weather information regarding the potential for future fire activity and large fire growth (see graph below).

## **Lower 48**

- The National Preparedness Level remains at PL 4 with more than 7,200 firefighting personnel assigned to incidents across the western U.S. There are three Type 1 incident management teams assigned to fires in Arizona and Colorado and 7 Type 2 incident management teams assigned to fires in Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, California, Montana.
- The Pacific Northwest, Northern Rockies and northern Great Basin remain in the grip of a record-breaking heat wave that is producing record-breaking, triple digit temperatures in northern California, Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The hot, dry weather could lead to new fire starts that could increase competition for resources nationwide.

## **Fire Information Resources**

- [www.akfireinfo.com](http://www.akfireinfo.com) – Word Press blog with daily fire updates and other information

- <https://fire.ak.blm.gov/content/aicc/sitreport/AICC%20Situation%20Report.pdf> – Daily Alaska wildfire situation report from Alaska Interagency Coordination Center with daily rundown of fire activity in Alaska.
- <https://blm-egis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/index.html#/a23a625f4d18412ea13cffeefcbe7f5e> - Alaska Interagency Coordination Center dashboard with all sorts of nifty fire information.
- <https://fire.ak.blm.gov/> - Alaska Interagency Coordination Center
- <https://www.facebook.com/AK.Forestry> - Division of Forestry Facebook page. All info that is posted to akfireinfo is posted here as well, along with other fire information. Info from both DOF and AFS is posted here.
- <https://www.facebook.com/BLMAFS> -BLM Alaska Fire Service Facebook page. All info that is posted to akfireinfo is posted here as well, along with other fire information. Info from both DOF and AFS is posted here.
- <https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/sitreprt.pdf> - Daily national situation report from the National Interagency Coordination Center with a rundown of fire activity in all regions of the United States and Canada.