

# DOF Daily WildFire Update

July 4, 2021

## 2021 Alaska Wildland Fire Numbers

As of Sunday, July 4



- **Number of wildfires to date: 286**
- **Acres burned statewide to date: 106,210**
- **New fires yesterday: 3**
- **Current active fires: 60**
- **Current number of staffed fires: 5**
- **Personnel assigned to fires: 226**
- **Human-caused fires to date: 187**
- **Lightning-caused fires to date: 84**
- **Natural-caused fires to date: 5**
- **Undetermined fire causes to date: 10**



The Munson Creek Fire as seen from the top of Chena Dome on Friday, July 2, 2021.

### Munson Creek Fire

**Size:** 12,000 acres

**Containment:** 0% (Not a full suppression fire; point protection only)

**Start date:** June 18

**Cause:** Lightning

**Location:** 50 miles east of Fairbanks and 1 mile south of Chena Hot Springs.

**Personnel:** 106

Resources assigned: 3 Type 21A crews; 8 smokejumpers; 3 helicopters; 1 Type 3 engine; 5 Type 6 engines; 1 Type 7 engine; 2 dozers; 1 water tender.



The Munson Creek Fire as seen from the top of Chena Dome on Friday, July 2.

- Fire behavior on the Munson Creek Fire moderated yesterday evening due in part to light precipitation and movement of the fire from thick spruce into different fuel types. The fire “laid down” about two hours earlier than previous days with the cooler, moister weather. Southwest winds pushed smoke away from the resort and Fairbanks.

- Even so, the size of the fire increased significantly from previous estimates due to more accurate mapping. A break in smoke conditions allowed a low-level mapping flight of the fire for the first time in several days. The fire is now estimated at 19,700 acres, an increase almost 8,000 acres.
- The fire remains about 1 mile south of Chena Hot Springs and about 1 ¼ mile from Chena Hot Springs Road in the area of the Angel Rocks Trailhead around Mile 48. The road and hot springs remain open.
- A “Set” evacuation notice remains in effect for cabin and homeowners between Mile 45 and Chena Hot Springs at the end of the road at Mile 56.5. A “Set” evacuation notice means people should be prepared to leave their homes at a moment’s notice.
- Crews are taking advantage of cooler weather today to continue point protection to create defensible space around structures from Chena Hot Springs Resort at Mile 56.5 Chena Hot Springs Road west to Mile 48. This involves clearing brush and installing hose, pumps and sprinklers around structures as needed to protect them from the fire should it impact them.
- Crews continued to gather information about structures along a 10-mile stretch of Chena Hot Springs Road from the hot springs west to Mile 45, including cabins on the North and West Forks of the Chena River. Photos, locations and resources and time needed to protect them is being added to a database which will be available for future fires or other incidents.
- Firefighters will also open up an old survey line south and west of the resort to protect the complex, which includes a hotel, restaurant, swimming pool and other structures for guests and staff. Hose will be laid along the line to provide a water source if needed. The line will run from two aurora viewing yurts to an old burn scar.



Yukon Fire Crew member Jonathan Nick wets down the vegetation around a cabin Sunday, July 4, 2021, as they check sprinkler systems. Sam Harrel/Alaska DNR-Division of Forestry



Yukon Fire Crew Boss trainee Matthew Habermann, second from left, points out an old burn area across the West Fork Chena River from Shawn McCullough, right, and his wife, Janey's home on Sunday, July 4, 2021. Sam Harrel/Alaska DNR-Division of Forestry

- Several fires have burned in the area since 2002. Less dense and less volatile fuels are present in areas previously burned, which serve to slow fire spread. Fire managers are taking advantage of old fire scars in planning management actions on the Munson Creek Fire.
- Fire managers are also supporting eight smokejumpers who have identified and completed point protection on four cabins along the Middle Fork of the Chena River. Jumpers are being ferried to different locations by airboat. Additional fire crews are available to help along the Middle Fork if needed.

- The Tanana Chiefs and White Mountain crews continue work on the Munson Creek Fire. The UAF Nanooks and Gannett Glacier fire crews are scheduled to arrive on Monday and will replace the Yukon Crew whose two-week assignment ends today.
- A public meeting was held at Chena Hot Springs Resort and a crowd of about 30 people gathered to get an update on the fire.
- All Alaska State Parks facilities east of milepost 45 Chena Hot Springs Road remain closed for public safety, including the Angel Rocks Trail and trailhead and Chena Dome Trail and trailhead.
- Estimated cost to date is \$216,140.

### Other wildfire activity

- DOF responded to three new fires on Saturday – an escaped burn barrel in the Butte area in the Mat-Su Area; a vehicle accident/fire with wildland involvement in the Mat-Su Area and a powerline fire in the Fairbanks Area. All three fires were contained and controlled at less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> acre.
- The 33-acre **Deadwood Fire** near Central on the Steese Highway received some precipitation Sunday morning. The Midnight Sun crew and smokejumpers are working on the tail of the fire moving towards the head. No additional spot fires were found. Tentative demobilization for 16 smokejumpers is tomorrow. Estimated cost to date is \$20,000.
- Chena Hotshots and the North Star Crew continue with point protection today on allotments near the perimeter of the 45,644-acre **Dry Creek Fire** 6 miles south of Manley Hot Springs. With moderate to gusty winds out of the southwest, the fire jumped the Zitziana river. Smokejumpers on the ground were sent with a boat and water pumps to suppress the small, smoldering fires burning in tundra. As winds are forecast to stay out of the southwest, additional personnel may be repositioned at the northeast side of the fire. The fire is running into a large 2018 burn scar in that area which should moderate fire behavior. There are multiple allotments within 6 miles of the fire. Estimated cost to date is \$820,000.
- The BLM Alaska Fire Service deployed four smokejumpers to the **Cultas Creek Fire** in the Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve approximately 135 miles east Fairbanks. The lightning-caused 7,000-acre fire was reported in a Limited protection area on June 17 and has been allowed to burn. The fire is closing in on two cabins and a remote weather station. Two smokejumpers were positioned on the Sam Creek cabin and another 2 smokejumpers were positioned on Ben Creek cabin. The fire is 300 feet and opposite the creek from the Sam Creek, which is one of the oldest log structures in the preserve. It is surrounded by an old burn scar and the cabin is looking fairly well protected. At Ben cabin, a water pump and sprinkler kits are being set up for helispot and structure protection
- There was no growth on the 17-acre **Brock Road Fire** near North Pole and the fire size actually decreased by 1 acre after crews walked the perimeter. The UAF Nanooks Crew was demobilized Friday evening and will report to the Munson Creek Fire on Monday. The Fairbanks #1 Crew will be demobed on Monday after completing a final grid today. Estimated cost to date is \$229,928.

### Weather

- **Short Term Forecast:** Warming and drying in central/ eastern Interior and Southcentral through Monday. Chance for Red Flag Warnings north of the Alaska Range on Monday. Minimal thunderstorms today, but eastern Interior could see lightning tomorrow. Southwest and Western Alaska will remain cool and damp. Southern Panhandle warming into the 70s for next 3 days.
- **Long Range Forecast:** Low pressure moves in by Tuesday, bringing cooler temps and increased chances for showers in the Interior through the workweek. Eastern Interior likely to remain the driest part of the state. Deeper fuels there are starting to become very dry.

## **Fire Restrictions**

- A burn suspension is currently in effect through the holiday 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.
- The City of North Pole banned the sale of fireworks within the city on Friday due to high fire danger.

## **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.
- The Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group will meet on Wednesday (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**

- As of Saturday morning, a total of 31,509 fires have burned 1,546,500 acres nationally. The number of fires is about 4,000 higher than the 10-year average for this date but the acreage burned is more than 800,000 acres less than the 10-year average.
- 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 5 Type 2 IMTs assigned to fires in Arizona, Wyoming, California, Montana. Northern California has moved to a PL4. All other Geographic Areas are at PL3 or lower.

## **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.