

# DOF Daily WildFire Update

July 6, 2021

## 2021 Alaska Wildland Fire Numbers

As of Tuesday, July 6



- **Number of wildfires to date: 292**
- **Acres burned statewide to date: 142,747**
- **New fires yesterday: 3**
- **Current active fires: 53**
- **Current number of staffed fires: 5**
- **Personnel assigned to fires: 244**
- **Human-caused fires to date: 193**
- **Lightning-caused fires to date: 86**
- **Natural-caused fires to date: 5**
- **Undetermined fire causes to date: 11**



Tanker 540 makes a retardant drop on the Lichen Fire near Mile 91 of the Parks Highway on Sunday night. Photo by Tristan Reid /Caswell Volunteer Fire Department

### Wildfire Activity

- Alaska saw a 20,000+ increase in the total number of acres burned for the season on Sunday, the largest, single-day increase so far this season, and a 14,000+ acreage increase on Monday, bringing the total acres burned for the season to 142,747 acres, still a relatively small number this late in the fire season.
- Thirteen fires around the state were declared out on Monday, 10 of which were in DOF protection areas. That reduces the total number of Active fires in Alaska to 53 as of Tuesday morning. There are 46 fires in Monitor status.

### Weather

- **SHORT-TERM FORECAST:** Cool and damp with breezy southwest flow for most of the state Tuesday and Wednesday. Isolated wet thunderstorms in northern and eastern Alaska today. Driest in the far southeastern Interior and Yukon Flats. Southern Panhandle warming into the upper 70s again today, rain returning by Thursday.
- **LONG-RANGE FORECAST:** Long wave trough over the state will keep cooler temps and increased shower potential through the workweek. Eastern Interior likely to remain the driest part of the state. Deeper fuels there are starting to become very dry. Ridging builds in over the weekend to begin to dry out northern Alaska.
- Fairbanks received its first measurable rainfall in more than two weeks on Tuesday. It wasn't much – 0.11" – but it was the first measurable rainfall at Fairbanks International Airport since June 19.

## Fire danger/potential

- Fire spread potential is greatly reduced across much of the state. Initial Spread Indexes (ISI) in the east are still elevated with rapid rates of spread possible. While surface fuels are moderating, subsurface drying continues. Critical Buildup Indexes (BUI) in the central and eastern Interior are unlikely to be affected by the showery precipitation in the forecast. Spruce Adjective Rating (SAR) has dropped across a majority of Alaska with the greatest potential mainly in the east. Cooler temps have reduced the footprint of the Extreme area.

## Fire restrictions

- There are burn suspensions remained in effect today in Delta Junction, Fairbanks and Tok due to high fire danger. The suspensions in Delta and Fairbanks will continue through at least Wednesday.

# Wildfire Activity

- The **Munson Creek Fire** 50 miles northeast of Fairbanks remains the #1 priority fire in the state. Here's an update as of 6 p.m. Tuesday.
  - No structures at Chena Hot Springs Resort or along Chena Hot Springs Road have been lost. The fire came within 100 yards of the resort Monday night but firefighters were positioned to stop it from coming closer.
  - The fire received light rain throughout the day Tuesday to help moderate fire behavior.
  - There are approximately 150 firefighters working on the fire.
  - Firefighters wet down buildings around the resort and cabins closest to the fire with pumps, hoses and sprinklers that have been set up during the past week in anticipation of the fire reaching the resort. Pilot cars escorted vehicles toward and away from the resort last night to minimize traffic conflicts with fire vehicles.
  - Cooler temperatures, higher relative humidity and light rain has helped ease fire behavior on the fire today. The fire has received light rain on and off throughout the day. Current conditions at Chena Hot Springs are described as smoky and overcast.
  - The fire is now estimated at 25,728 acres but is likely bigger after yesterday's growth.



Fingers of the Munson Creek Fire creep down the hillside a short distance behind Chena Hot Springs Resort on Tuesday morning, July 6.



A tree torches behind Chena Hot Springs Resort on Monday evening, July 5.

- The fire intensified on Monday and hit a management action point established by fire managers, prompting a “Go” evacuation order for residents from Mile 48 Chena Hot Springs Road to Chena Hot Springs Resort at the end of the road at Mile 56.5. That includes guests and staff at Chena Hot Springs Resort. State Troopers checked all cabins from 48 Mile to the resort to make sure inhabitants were aware of the evacuation order and to document how many people planned to remain overnight. Approximately 30 cabin residents opted to stay in the area. Troopers also spoke to guests and staff at Chena Hot Springs Resort to make them aware of the situation.
- Fingers of the fire continues backing down a hillside directly behind the hot springs and firefighters are strategically positioned to catch the fire as it comes down the hillside in different spots.
- The fire continues to creep down the hillside behind Chena Hot Springs Resort and helicopters are making water bucket drops on the fire in the bowl behind the Aurora Ice Museum to check the fire up. Bucket drops are also being used to slow the fire's advance as it comes down the hillside near Mile 54 Chena Hot Springs Road.
- Crews are also taking direct action on the fire on the hillside behind Chena Hot Springs to slow its progress. Crews are constructing a control line from an aurorium on the hillside behind the resort to connect in to a backburn conducted east of the hot springs Monday night. The Pioneer Peak Hotshot Crew from Palmer has arrived at the fire and will be plugged in to assist with suppression and structure protection.
- As of Tuesday, firefighters have plumbed 72 cabins along Chena Hot Springs Road from Mile 48 to 56 with pumps, hoses and sprinklers to protect them if the fire advances that far.
- Estimated cost to date is \$677,332



Logistics section chief Dane Smigleski hoses down the outside of the hotel at Chena Hot Springs Resort on



Galen Milchman of the White Mountain Crew hoses down the green during a backburn conducted Monday evening July 5 at Chena Hot Springs Resort.

**NOTE: The Munson Creek Fire has created somewhat of a social media firestorm as a result of the Chena Hot Springs Resort owner refusing to evacuate guests and animals at the resort. A Facebook post with a short video of two people sitting in the outdoor rock pool as the fire burned on the hillside behind them generated more than 28,000 engagements, more than 800 shares and more than 220 comments, most of them directed at the resort owner’s unwillingness to evacuate staff, guests and animals. There are also comments praising firefighters and DOF for the work they are doing to protect the resort and cabins/homes along Chena Hot Springs Road. The DOF information office is monitoring social media comments.**

The Mat-Su Area Forestry station made a good catch on the **Lichen Fire** near Mile 91 of the Parks Highway north of Willow on Sunday night.

The 2.5-acre **Lichen Fire** was reported at 6:42 p.m. near several homes. Three Mat-Su engines, a prevention engine, air attack, two air tankers and Mat-Su Helitack responded, as well as engines and firefighters from multiple local fire departments. The fire was in close proximity to several homes and a handful of homes were evacuated as a precaution in the early stages of the fire.

A coordinated response between local fire departments and Mat-Su Area Forestry helped contain the fire within a few hours. Air tankers made retardant drops on the flank of the fire closest to homes and helicopters did bucket work to knock down the flames and douse any spot fires at the head of the fire. Firefighters got a hose lay and line completely around the fire by 8:30 p.m. and it was declared fully contained just after 11 p.m. Water provided by fire department tenders played a key role in helping contain the fire. The Pioneer Peak Hotshot Crew mopped up the fire on Monday. The cause of the fire is suspected to be fireworks but the cause remains under investigation.



Tanker 540 makes a retardant drop on the Lichen Fire Sunday night near Mile 91 of the Parks Highway. Photo by Tristan Reid/Caswell Volunteer Fire Department



A photo of the Lichen Fire during initial attack Sunday, July 4.

### **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.