



DOF Daily WildFire Update

July 20, 2021



2021 Alaska Wildland Fire Numbers

As of Tuesday, July 20



- **Number of wildfires: 316**
- **Acres burned statewide: 179,574**
- **New fires yesterday: 3**
- **Current active fires: 36**
- **Current number of staffed fires: 2**
- **Personnel assigned to fires: 54**
- **Human-caused fires: 210**
- **Lightning-caused fires: 88**
- **Natural-caused fires: 6**
- **Undetermined fire causes: 12**



Activity increased on the Munson Creek Fire east of Chena Hot Springs on Monday as seen in this photo taken during an aerial reconnaissance flight. Ernest Prax/Alaska DNR-Division of Forestry

Alaska IMT, Pioneer Peak Hotshots mobilize to Boise

The Alaska Type 1 Incident Management Team, two Alaska hotshot crews and more than a dozen Alaska Smokejumpers have been mobilized to the Lower 48 to assist with wildland fire management in the western United States.

The Alaska IMT, which consists of approximately 70 highly trained wildland firefighting personnel from multiple Alaska state and federal agencies, flew out on a chartered jet from the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) on Tuesday. The Team will be prepositioned in Boise, Idaho, home to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), to await an assignment.

In addition to the Alaska IMT, two Alaska hotshot crews and 17 Alaska Smokejumpers have departed Alaska to the Lower 48 to support fire suppression and management efforts.

Judging from the level of wildfire activity currently in the western U.S., the Team won't have to wait long for an assignment. As of Tuesday morning, 14 of the country's 16 Type 1 IMTs were assigned to fires in six different states – California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. There were also 22 Type 2 IMTs assigned to fires in those six states as well as Colorado and Wyoming.

Historic drought across the western U.S. has fire managers worried that this could be a devastating fire season. The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) elevated the National Preparedness Level to PL5 – on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest – on July 14. This is the earliest the NICC went to PL 5 in the past 10 years. As of Tuesday there was more than 19,300 firefighting personnel assigned to 107 different fires in 11 states. There is a critical resource shortage for crews, engines, incident management teams and overhead personnel.



The Pioneer Peak Interagency Hotshot Crew board a chartered jet from the National Interagency Coordination Center at the Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage on Tuesday for the flight to Boise, Idaho. Kale Casev/Alaska Incident Management Team.

Given the dire situation in the western U.S. and the fact that Alaska often relies on resources from the Lower 48 to help manage wildfires during busy seasons, Alaska IMT Incident Commander Norm McDonald said wildland firefighters in Alaska are obligated to help out in the Lower 48.

"It's part of our duty and our mission," said McDonald, who also serves as chief of the Alaska Division of Forestry's Wildland Fire and Aviation Program. "We're part of a

national response plan and will do what we can to help. When we need support from the Lower 48, like we did in 2019 when we brought more than 5,000 personnel up from 45 different states, they come up and help us. We're going to do everything we can to help them."

BLM Alaska Fire Service manager Kent Slaughter echoed McDonald's sentiments.

"We have a dual responsibility to serve the public in Alaska as well as the rest of the country," he said. "We balance those needs carefully and weigh the risks and forecasts. We are supporting the efforts in the rest of the country with helicopters, smokejumpers, and the Chena Hotshots. Our fire management officers ensure that we keep the resources necessary to respond to new fires."

With recent hot, dry weather across the eastern Interior and Southcentral and no significant rain in the forecast, fire season in Alaska isn't over yet. With continued potential for wildfires in Alaska, both McDonald and Slaughter stressed that adequate resources will remain to respond to any new wildfires.

"Our first priority is protecting Alaskans," McDonald said. "We want to ensure there are enough resources here to honor that commitment."

Once significant rainfall puts an end to Alaska's fire season, additional resources will be made available to assist in the Lower 48, as is typically the case from late July through September.

The Division of Forestry's Pioneer Peak Interagency Hotshot Crew traveled to Boise with the Alaska IMT on Tuesday while the BLM Alaska Fire Service's Chena IHC traveled to Boise last week. The Chena

Hotshots are currently working on the 2,086-acre Green Ridge Fire in the Umatilla National Forest in Oregon. There are also a handful of overhead personnel from Alaska in the Lower 48.

As of Tuesday, resources remaining in Alaska include one Type 1 hotshot crew, two Type 2 initial attack crews and five Type 2 crews, as well as an air tanker, four water-scooping aircraft and multiple helicopters at both the Division of Forestry and BLM Alaska Fire Service. DOF's six Area stations around the state are also staffed with a full compliment of firefighters and engines for initial attack on fires.

Hot, dry weather revitalizes Munson Creek Fire

Recent hot, dry weather has re-energized the Munson Creek Fire near Chena Hot Springs east of Fairbanks. The fire was most recently estimated at 43,746 acres on Saturday but has grown in size since then based on reconnaissance flights the past three days.

The fire was producing a significant smoke column south of Chena Hot Springs on Monday and Tuesday that was clearly visible from Chena Hot Springs Resort. The fire is most active on the northeast corner well east of Chena Hot Springs and Far Mountain, and along the southern perimeter along the Middle Fork Chena River. The fire has not crossed the river and remains north of the river.

The fire is mainly burning into the wilderness in those areas, though there are a handful of cabins and mining camps along the river that have structure protection set up around them. The fire is also burning up interior pockets of vegetation that hadn't previously burned inside the fire perimeter.

There was also increased activity on a small chunk of the west perimeter near Bear Paw Butte east of Chena Hot Springs Road between mileposts 49-53. The fire remains anywhere from 1-3 miles east of the road in that area and there is no increased threat despite the heightened fire activity. A 'Set' evacuation notice remains in effect for residences in that area and at Chena Hot Springs Resort.



Guests walk through the parking lot at Chena Hot Springs Resort as the Munson Creek Fire puts up a smoke column south of Chena Hot Springs on Monday, July 19, 2021. Mike McMillan/Alaska DNR-Division of Forestry

The Munson Creek Fire was started by lightning and reported on June 18. The fire was initially located in a Limited protection area about 5 miles south of Chena Hot Springs and was allowed to burn. Firefighters were called in two weeks later when the fire blew up and advanced over a ridgetop about 2 miles from Chena Hot Springs Resort. Parts of the fire came within 100 yards of structures at the resort but firefighters strategically positioned to meet the fire were able to keep it out of the resort complex.

There were more than 200 firefighters assigned to the fire a week and a half ago but that number has been scaled back considerably and stood at 44 personnel on Tuesday morning. Management of the fire transitioned to a smaller Type 4 team on Saturday with Ernest Prax as the new incident commander.

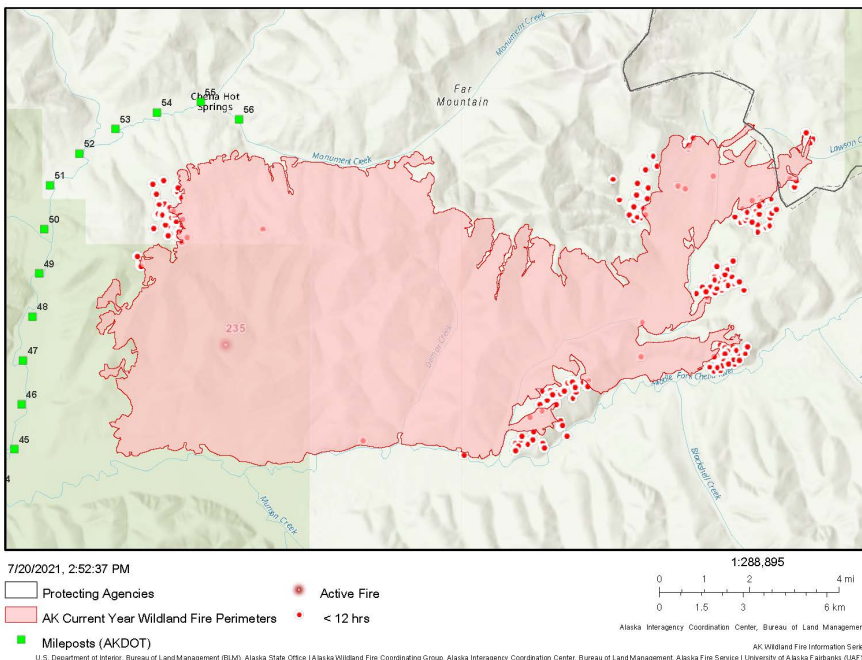
Firefighters are “aggressively monitoring,” the fire, Prax said. The White Mountain Type 2 Initial Attack Crew remain on the fire and members are stationed at a few different lookout points to monitor fire behavior. Some crew members are also scouting the fire around Bear Paw Butte east of Chena Hot Springs Road around Mile 53, where the fire remains stalled in a riparian area in a creek drainage.



The Munson Creek Fire puts up a smoke column east of Chena Hot Springs on Monday, July 19, 2021. Ernest Prax/Alaska DNR-Division of Forestry

Firefighters in six engines are patrolling along the road while also gathering information on the location of cabins in the area to add to a known-sites database. The database contains information on the structures and what would be required to protect them in the event of future fires in the area.

Munson Creek Fire - 43,746 acres as of July 17



The map at left shows the perimeter of the 43,746-acre Munson Creek Fire as of Saturday, July 17, 2021. The red dots represent heat points detected Tuesday where the fire has been burning in the last 12 hours. The fire is most active on the northeast corner well east of Chena Hot Springs and Far Mountain, and along the southern perimeter along the Middle Fork Chena River. The fire has not crossed the river and remains north of the river. There was also increased activity on a small chunk of the west perimeter near Bear Paw Butte east of Chena Hot Springs Road between mileposts 49-53.

Tanker 52 keeping busy in Washington

Tanker 52 has been staying busy in the Lower 48. One of DOF's two contract air tankers from Conair, Tanker 52 left Alaska for the Lower 48 on July 14 and has been flying pretty much every day it's been available. The tanker remains on contract with DOF but the management agencies who use it pay for its time in the Lower 48, thus saving the State of Alaska money. The tanker is stationed at a U.S. Forest Service retardant base at the Grant County International Airport in Moses Lake, Wash. It was put to work almost immediately. It has worked on two fires – the 32,473-acre Cub Creek 2 Fire 5 miles north of Winthrop and the 674-acre Goddard Road Fire 2 miles north of Rice. Below are details on its daily activity since arriving.

- July 16 – 4 drops on the Goddard Road Fire for total flight time of 4.88 hours.
- July 17 – 6 drops on the Cub Creek 2 Fire for 5.99 flight hours.
- July 18 – 6 drops on the Cub Creek 2 Fire for 5.26 flight hours.
- July 19 – day off.

State Fire Warehouse busy even during slow season

Despite what has been a below average fire season in terms of number of fires and acreage burned – 314 fires and 179,228 acres burned as of Monday morning – the Division of Forestry's two fire warehouses in Fairbanks and Palmer have mobilized an ample amount of supplies to fires this season. The chart below provided by State Fire Warehouse Manager Jack Hoch details quantities of hose, pumps and fresh food boxes that have been shipped out, as well as the monetary value of each of those items. So far the two warehouses have issued 135 miles of hose, nearly 400 Mark 3 pumps and almost 1,000 fresh food boxes. The bulk of these items were issued to the Haystack and Munson Creek fires in Fairbanks and the Loon Lake Fire on the Kenai Peninsula.

ITEM	QTY SFW	QTTY PAS	TOTAL QTY	VALUE	COMMENTS
001238 HOSE, 1"	1643 LG	795 LG	2438	\$329,203	135 MILES
001239 HOSE, 1.5 "	2581 LG	1296 LG	3877	\$656,415	OF HOSE ISSUED
PUMPS MK 3 AND LTWT	270 EA	126 EA	396	\$1,267,200	
FRESH FOOD BOX A	744 EA		744	\$320,000	
FRESH FOOD BOX B	238 EA		238	\$90,000	
TOTAL VALUE ISSUED TO FIRES	\$2,861,382	\$1,235,059		\$4,096,441	

BLM AFS warehouse ships supplies to Montana and Idaho

The BLM Alaska Fire Service Warehouse Cache sent down six truck loads of supplies to caches in Montana and Idaho on Sunday totaling almost \$4 million worth of equipment, most of which were pumps and hose.

The Alaska Fire Service Warehouse Cache is home to one of 16 National Fire Caches. It provides supplies and equipment for all wildland fire suppression and fire management operations in coordination with other statewide agencies such as the State of Alaska. It also coordinates supply operations with the other National Fire Caches.

The Alaska cache typically has \$16 million of inventory on hand, but will request additional equipment during busy fire seasons such as it did in 2019. Then, once Alaska fire season starts to slow down, the Alaska cache will send supplies south as requested. Last year, the cache sent seven truck loads to the Lower 48. However, Cache personnel will ensure there is enough equipment on hand to respond to support Alaska wildfires.

It's another example of Alaskans helping out during national emergency response situations – even from a distance.

Kenai Peninsula Borough hosting CWPP meetings

Staff from the DOF Coastal Region and Kenai/Kodiak Forestry station will be participating in a series of meetings and open houses this week organized by the Kenai Peninsula Borough to update Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) in Kenai Peninsula communities. CWPPs address wildfire planning, response, and recovery for individual communities. The borough is holding the meetings to ensure the CWPPs for different communities reflect the community's preferences for emergency management, education and outreach, and fuels reduction activities to effectively lower wildfire risk.

A total of 17 different CWPPs were developed for Kenai Peninsula Borough communities between 2006 and 2009. The borough is leading an effort to develop a borough-wide CWPP update that encompasses all communities in collaboration with the All Lands/All Hands Interagency Group (ALAH Group) to ensure the plan is current and best serves the communities it is designed to protect. Members from this group include municipal, state, federal, and tribal land management agencies. The public is being invited to review CWPP planning materials and provide input to identify areas where efforts should be focused to reduce wildfire threat. A story map has been created at www.kpb.us/cwpp and will be used as a primary two-way communication tool to provide information and gather community input about the project. In the future, the public will be invited to provide feedback on the draft plan.

A schedule of meetings is listed below. Meetings for off-road communities and central peninsula communities are being scheduled for August.

- Tuesday, July 20 – East Peninsula Communities, Seward Community Library and Museum, 6-8 p.m.

- Wednesday, July 21 – Cooper Landing School Gym, 6-8 p.m.
- Thursday, July 22 – Soldotna Creek Park, 4-6 p.m.
- Friday, July 23 – South Peninsula Communities, West Homer Elementary School gym, 4-6 p.m.
- Saturday, July 24 – Northwest Peninsula Communities, Nikiski Community Recreation Center, 6-8 p.m.

Fire Information Resources

- 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.