State of Alaska
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Forestry
Fire Management Section

1981 Annual Report



Theodore G. Smith State Forester

prepared by State Fire Management Staff Division of Forestry



1981 ANNUAL REPORT

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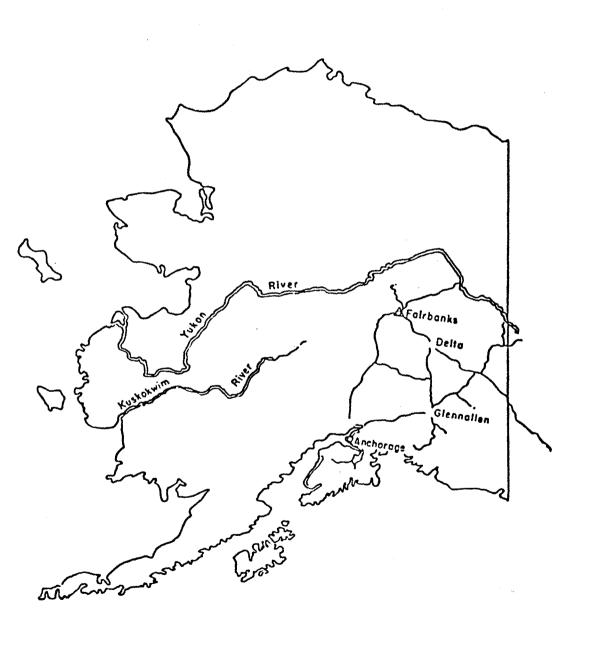
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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes various aspects of the 1981 Wildfire Season activity. The information contained in this report was gathered from the State of Alaska's Individual Fire Report System, the Fire Weather Forecast Service and bills received at the state office from private vendors and contracts.

This information should assist in evaluating the 1981 Wildfire Season and the planning of the 1982 Wildfire Season.



1981 Wildfire Activity

Rumors everywhere predicted this as the "Big Season." Not since the late sixties had this particular combination of early breakup, mild-dry spring, and early season thunderstorms interacted to produce the numbers of wildfires that were occurring.

The State began receiving reports of small fires as early as March. The pre-green-up fuels were tinder day and unprotected with snow cover long since vanished. Each day proved warmer and drier, allowing some spring controlled burning projects to become almost unmanageable in erratic winds.

Firefighters brought on duty early in the season hurriedly prepared equipment and supplies in expectation of activity to come. April was proving out with 30% more fire occurrences than average. In May the fire occurrence tripled, larger fires tapped supplies quickly and fire behavior was considered extreme on the Dune Lake fire which reached a final total of 172,500 acres.

Crews and overhead teams had not yet fully recovered from the three week Dune Lake fire when, suddenly, dry thunderstorms blanketed the entirety of central Alaska's interior, and left it ablaze from the Kuskokwim Valley in the Southwest, to the Yukon River, over 500 hundred miles to the north.

The months of May and June saw 271,500 acres blackened by smoke bellowing, acre gulping wildfires raging largely unchecked with no natural barriers to slow them, and man's efforts seemingly inefectual against fire fronts measured in miles.

At the height of the state's effort to combat the problem fires, a fire control center was activated at the Fairbanks district office with a staff of over fifty personnel working 24 hours each day. From the headquaters major tactical decisions were made, coordination with BLM, U.S. Forest Service, and many state agencies was implemented, logistical arrangements were made for transportation of a thousand firefighters and management personnel who came from all parts of Alaska, and from several states in the lower forty-eight.

Aircraft travelled from the Yukon in Canada, and as far south as Louisianna, to work on Alaska's fires. Eighteen helicopters, three air tankers, and a multitude of small fixed wing were chartered to handle personal movements, retardant, and supply deliveries. The support requirements of the aircraft and their crews alone was staggering, and not without its complications and pitfalls.

Communications frequencies were continuously busy creating some concern by the personnel from Boise Interagency Fire Center, who did an excellent job of installing a radio network with portable repeaters connecting Fairbanks with the seven major project fires. Much work remains in the development of communications system which will provide a reliable system that is flexible enought to be adapted to remote situations.

At the peak of the fire activity, the state relied heavily on other agency resources. Expertise in aviation, communications, equipment, intelligence, and management was drafted from many agencies.

The spirit of cooperation among the coworkers was commendable, and without that extra assistance, a great deal of required functions would have simply gone undone. The result of any less of an effort than what was put forth, need not be described.

Just as suddenly as the conflagration began, July rains doused the still active fires. Rains came so steadily that creeks and rivers rose as much as three feet, dozer lines eroded, and rehabilitation projects were delayed.

Fire activity nearly stopped, falling from 215 fires in April, May and June, to 47 for the remainder of the season.

Had the rains not come, the state could easily have an unprecedented half million acres lost to wildfire.

With vagaries of individual fire seasons being what they are, fire control management can only hope to prepare a preplan for the worst. Anything less results in undermanning, loss of resources, and mind boggling expenditure. If the six million dollars spent during the 1981 fire suppression effort were applied to presuppression for more positions, specialized equipment, supplies, and training, almost definately total acres lost would be reduced, requiring less time and expenditure for fire control in future seasons.

The state's wildfire suppression responsibilities will continue to grow at a rapid rate. It is estimated that by 1985 the state will be responsible for protecting over 100 million acres. This is land that the Division of Forestry is statutorily responsible to protect. To provide adequate protection will require in innovative management to assure that the funds expended for suppression are commensurate with the values at risk. It is also imperative that the necessary funding be provided that will increase as the Division of Forestry assumes additional acreage to protect.

1981 FIRE ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Fires on State land State protected.

Lightning - cause Human - cause	$\frac{\text{No.}}{23}$ $\frac{211}{234}$	10% 90%	Acres 49,233 172,888 222,121	22% 78%
Fires on Federal land	State pro	tected		
Lightning - cause Human - cause	No. 13 20 33	39% 61%	Acres 50,064 23,075 73,139	68% 32%
Total fires on State	protected	lands		

^{*} Excludes 38 false alarm fires 267 + 38 = 305 total fire incidents

36

231

*267

District Workload Percentage

Lightning - cause

Human - cause

	Fire Incidents	Acres
SCD	60%	4.99%
NCD	39.9%	95%
SED	. 1%	.01%

PROJECT FIRES

13%

87%

The total expenditures and acreage of the 9 project fires that occurred in the 1981 wildfire season was \$6,599,526 for 270,769 acres that burned. The first project fire started May 18 and September 30 the last fires were declared out, which represents 104 days spent on project fires.

99,295

195,965 295,260 34%

66%

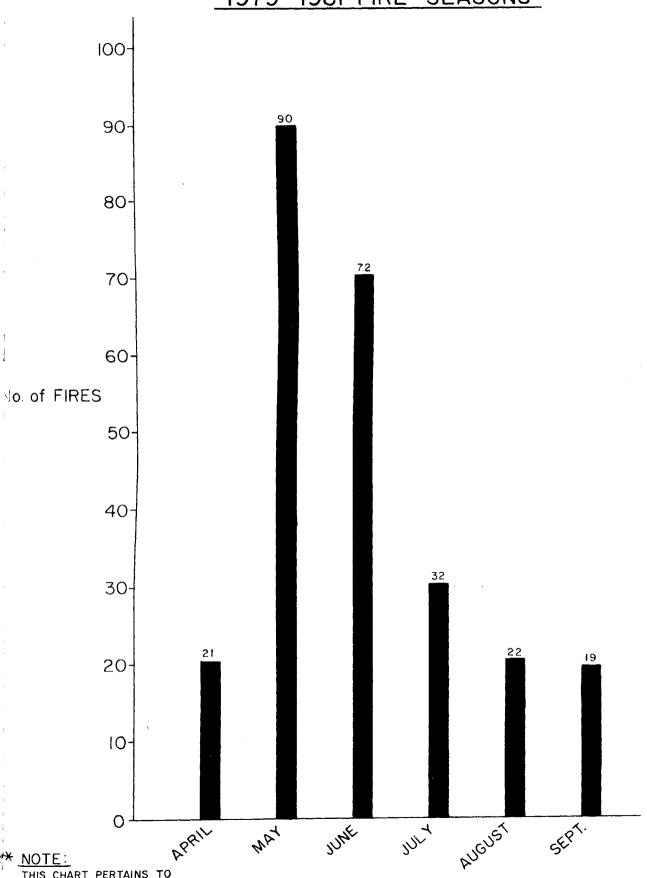
The most expensive was the Aggie Creek fire (111049) which cost \$2,116,395 and consumed 9,530 acres. The 26 days spent on rehabilitation of this fire was a primary factor of the high cost.

THREE YEAR SUMMARY OF STATE ACTION ON STATE LANDS

1981 STATE DNR WILDFIRE DATA SUMMARY

No. of fire incidents statewide: Northcentral District: Southcentral District: Southeast District:	287 117 168 2
Acres burned Statewide: Northcentral District: Southcentral District: Southcentral District:	224,270 221,287 2,976 7
<pre>Human - caused fires: Lightning - caused fires:</pre>	86.5% 13.5%
1980 STATE DNR WILDFIRE DATA SUMMARY	
No. of fire incidents statewide: Northcentral District: Southcentral District: Southeast District:	239 121 116 2
Acres Burned Statewide: Northcentral District: Southcentral District: Southeast District:	58,889 58,616 232 41
Human - caused fires Lightning - caused fires	95.3% 4.7%
1979 STATE DNR WILDFIRE DATA SUMMARY	
No. of fire incidents Statewide: Northcentral District: Southcentral District: Southeast District:	283 149 134 0
Acres burned Statewide: Northcentral District: Southcentral District: Southeast District:	42,500 467 42,033 0
<pre>Human - caused fires: Lightning - caused fires:</pre>	91. 9% 8.1%

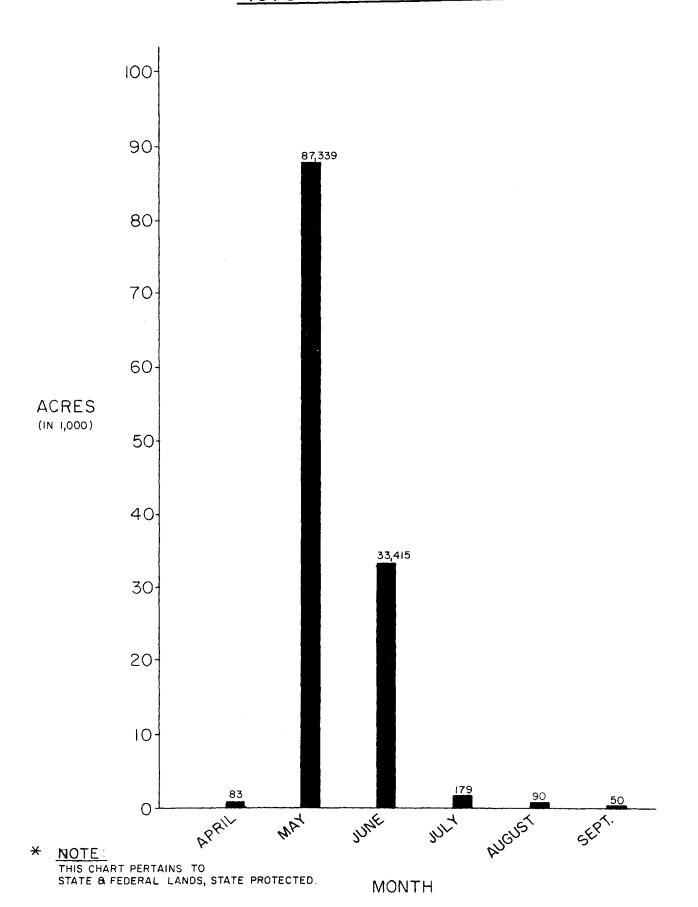
AVERAGE NUMBER OF FIRES PER MONTH * 1979-1981 FIRE SEASONS



THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE & FEDERAL LANDS, STATE PROTECTED.

MONTH

AVERAGE ACREAGE BURNED PER MONTH * 1979-1981 FIRE SEASONS



20 YEAR FIRE HISTORY ON STATE & PRIVATE LANDS

	No.	Acres	State and Private Acres Protected
<u>Year</u>	Fires	Burned	By DNR and BLM
1961	57	3,502	1,800,000
1962	26	9	3,185,250
1963*	68	1,060	8,215,100
1964	69	613	9,250,000
1965	123	3,320	14,000,000
1966	187	16,123	14,500,000
1967	130	2,939	15,200,000
1968	141	33,452	16,000,000
1969	260	195,833	16,000,000
1970	298	5,655	16,000,000
1971	216	9,700	16,000,000
1972	157	291	14,086,000
1973*	168	451	14,000,000
1974	262	460	14,000,000
1975*	141	900	14,000,000
1976	230	1,534	9,223,218
1977	299	1,668	22,615,468
1978*	261	3,841	24,515,468
1979	293	42,918	24,018,544
1980	232	58,364	30,169,801
1981*	287	224,270	57,052,406

★NOTES:

- (1) 1963 MatSu office opens No protection responsibility assumed.
- (2) 1973 Haines office opens State assumes first protection responsibility at Haines.
- (3) 1975 Kenai office opens State begins to assume additional protection responsibility on an assumed basis.
- (4) 1978 Delta, Fairbanks and Copper River offices open.
- (5) 1981 Division of Forestry established Anchorage and Mat-Su protection areas combined together.

ANNUAL FIRE TRAINING REPORT & SUMMARY

During 1981 a total of 415 students received training in one or more of the following courses for a total of 532 course hours and 6,036 trainee days (man days).

COURSE DESCRIPTION	NO. OF TRAINEES	COURSE HOURS	TRAINEE HOURS
Fire Duty Officer	22	20.0	440
Man/Animal Encounters	68	4.0	272
Personnel/Time Keeping	9	2.5	22
Pyroscan Use	6	2.5	15
Incident Command System	6	4.0	24
Fire Survival	27	4.0	108
Helicopter Safety	17	3.0	51
Emergency Command Center Operations	1	40.0	40
Pacific Pump Maintenance	1	40.0	40
National Wildfire Coordinating Group			
Instructors Conference	1	40.0	40
Fire Management II (CDF)	1	40.0	40
Plans Chief S-440	1	40.0	40
Fire Behavior for Managers	1	80.0	80
Service Chief S-450	1	40.0	40
EFF Crew Training	130	24.0	3120
Crew Boss S-230	18	24.0	432
Fire Business Management S-260	14	8.0	112
Basic Air Operations S-270	16	16.0	256
Firing Equipment/Firing Boss S-215	26	16.0	416
Portable Pumps & Water Use S-211	9	8.0	72
Chain Saw Safety S-214	22	8.0	176
Air Service Manager Heliport S-352	4	16.0	64
Intermediate Air Operations S-370	4	8.0	32
Organizing for Fire Suppression S-320	2	24.0	48
Sector Boss S-330	2	16.0	32
Bomb Identification	6	4.0	24
	415	532.0	6036

The following is a quantitative comparison of 1980 and 1981 fire training accomplishment compared to the proposed 5-year Training Plan Goals averaged out on an annual basis.

Goals	1980	1981	Proposed 5-Yr. Plan
	1980	1981	(Annual Average)
Initial Attack Trianing Course-Hours	326	103	286
Project Fire Training Course-Hours	216	117	528
E.F.F. Crew Training Course-Hours	64	130	192
Other Fire Training Courses-Hours	104	288	996
Total Course Hours	710	638	2002

Note: These are quantitative figures and do not reflect quality of training nor student days (man days) accomplished or required.

1981 FIRE SEASON WEATHER SUMMARY

The 1981 fire season can be divided into two fairly equal parts. The first part was dry and very active while the second was wet and relatively inactive. Of the approximately 305 fires and over 295,260 acres burned in 1981, over 248 fires and 295,000 acres were burned by June 30, 1981.

Summer arrived about a month early in 1981. April and May were unusually warm and dry, allowing the fire season to be in full stride in May. High thunderstorm activity and dry weather dominated the state in May and June. During the last week of June and early July, a significant change in the weather pattern occurred, that produced cloudy, wet and fairly cool weather in July and August.

This years fire season got off to an early start but also ended very early. The heavy rains in July and August extinguished most ongoing fires or at least made them manageable. By September, fuel moisture was so high in some areas that even campfires were next to impossible to start.

The first formal fire weather briefing was given on May 18, 1981 and the first forecast package was issued on May 25, 1981. The last official fire weather briefing was given on August 11, 1981 and the last forecast package was issued on August 28, 1981.

The following is the month-by-month summary of the weather patterns affecting Alaska this past fire season.

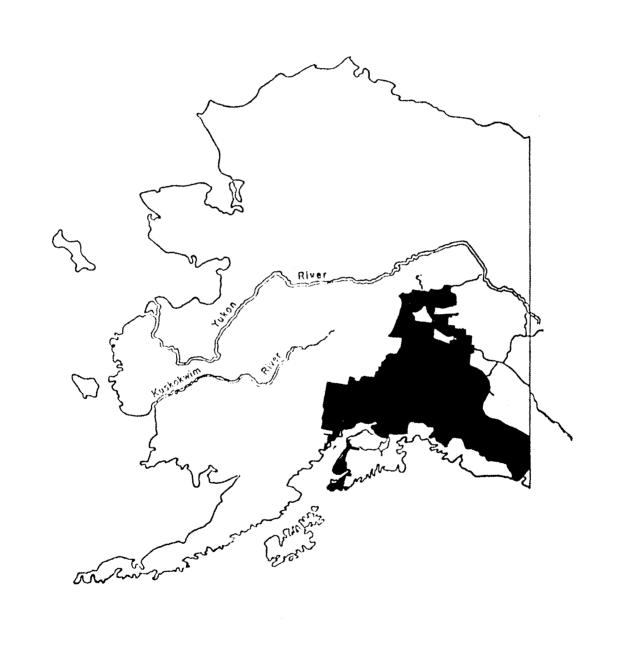
The last week in May there was a large high pressure area over most of the western part of Alaska which left most of the rest of the state with a very weak pressure pattern and very pleasant spring weather. The dryest areas were confined to a few small areas scattered throughout the central interior valleys. The maximum temperatures in the areas ranged from the low to middle 60's and climbed to the middle 70's and low 80's by weeks end. Thunderstorm activity got off to a very slow start as cumulus activity was widespread but very little lightning was reported during the early part of the week. This pattern changed very rapidly on May 30 and 31, 1981. On May 30, 1981 numerous lightning strikes were reported in the southern Chena and Fortymile areas with scattered amounts spread over the rest of the interior. On May 31, 1981 this pattern expanded to include the southern Galena and northern McGrath management areas.

In the first part of June the temperatures dropped from the 70's and 80's in the interior to the mid 50's and low 60's which caused an unstable air mass over most of southern Alaska. This caused an increase in thunderstorm activity over the interior, mostly along a line from the eastern Brooks Range to Bristol Bay. The weather continued to stay the same through mid June with temperatures in the high 60's to low 70's and moderate thunderstorm activity except in the western and southeastern part of the state which often saw ½ inch of rainfall in a 24 hour period. On the 17th, the thunderstorm activity shifted to the western interior with over 1600 strikes reported. The next few days the thunderstorms were widespread throughout most of the interior. The latter part of the month saw a decrease in temperatures and an increase in precipitation throughout the state.

The weather pattern for July was a continuation of the weather we had at the end of June, with moderate temperatures and large amounts of precipitation falling throughout the month. There was some thunderstorm activity in mid July in the Upper Yukon Valley and eastern Brooks Range areas, these were moist thunderstorms and created no problems.

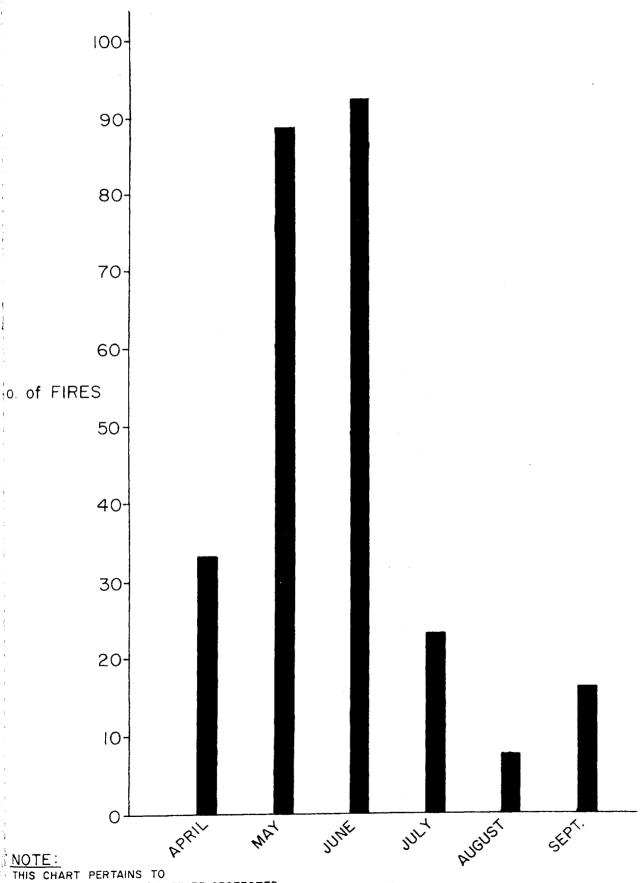
The weather in July continued through August with moist air masses throughout the state. Thunderstorm activity picked up at the start of the month peaking on the sixth through the ninth with numerous strikes extending from Bristol Bay through the Lower and Upper Yukon Valleys and the Kobuk Valley. These were moist thunderstorms and created no problems. This cool moist weather continued through the rest of the month and into September which ended the Fire Weather Operations for the summer of 1981.

STATE AND FEDERAL LANDS WITH STATE FIRE PROTECTION 1981 FIRE ACTIVITY STATISTICS



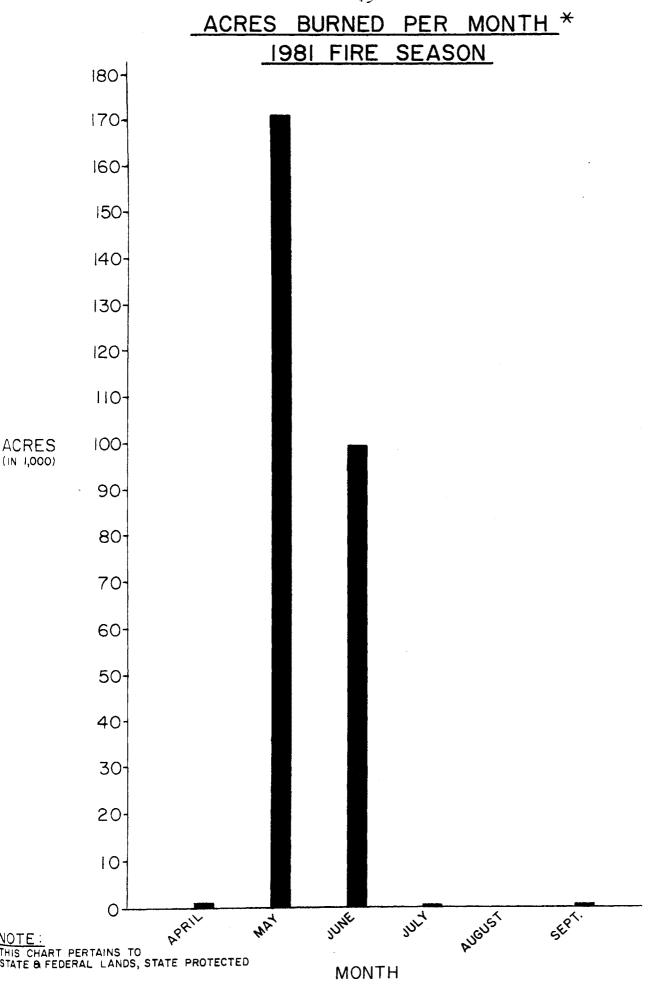
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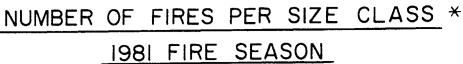
NUMBER OF FIRES PER MONTH *

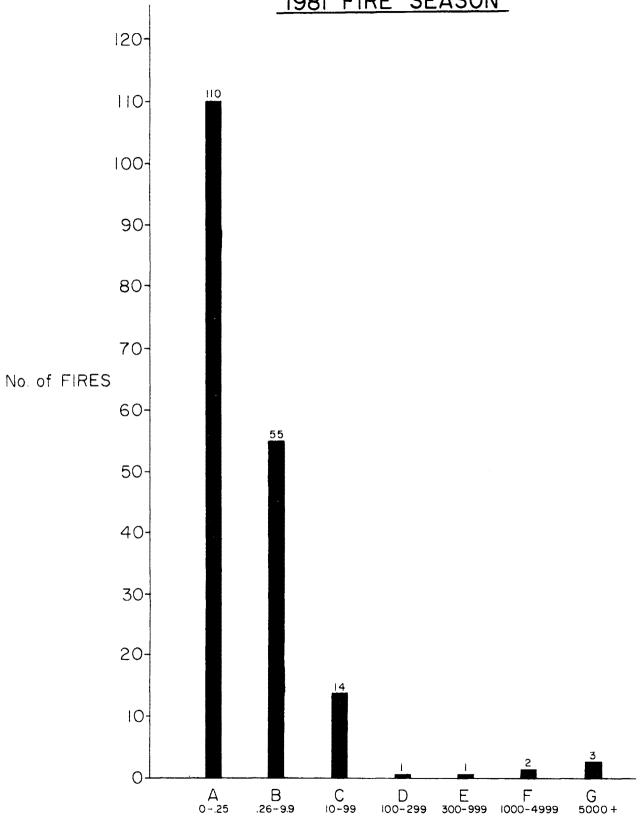


THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE & FEDERAL LANDS, STATE PROTECTED

MONTH







* NOTE:

THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE LANDS (STATE PROTECTED)

SIZE CLASS

1981

NUMBER OF FI	RE INCID	ENIS A	ND AC	RES E	BURNED :	X
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32	 4 	28	49	7	286	0	0	0	0	2	3,100	3	217,780	13	0	20	0	105	221,219
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* NOTE:

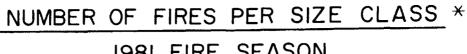
THIS CHART PERTAINS ONLY TO STATE LANDS (STATE PROTECTED).

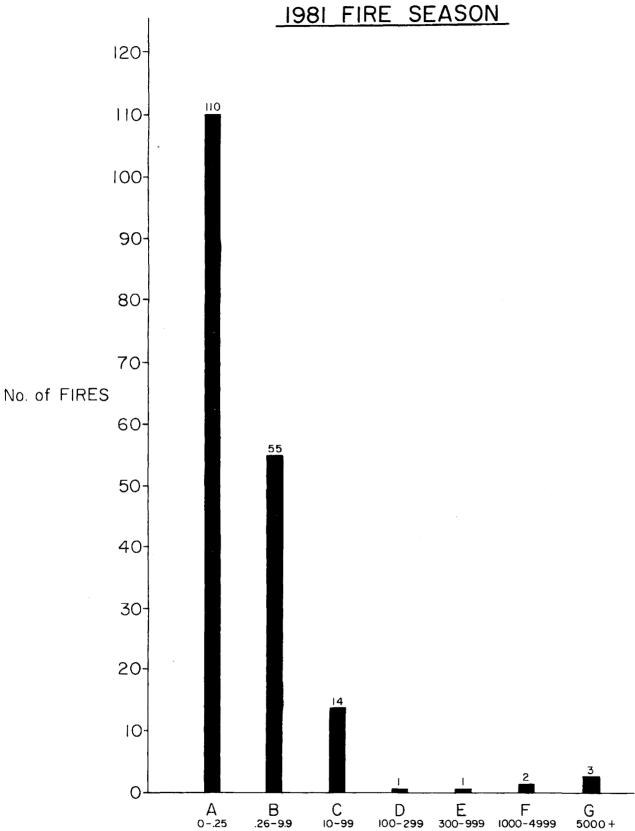
NUMBER OF FIRES AND ACRES BURNED *

	LIGH	TNING	CAMP	FIRE	EQUIF	MENT	DEB	RIS	SMOR	(ING	MI	SC.	RAIL	ROAD	INCE	IDARY	CHIL	DREN	тот	AL
	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES
ANCH.	2	276	8	. 58	0	0	7	61	ı	0	3		0	0	0	0	Į.	10	22	406
COPPER RIVER	2	 	1	0	2	0	6	5	1	0	4	 	0	0	ţ	0	I	0	18	6
KENAI	1	14	6	3	5	4	25	18	3	 2 	9	 7 	0	 0 	4	4	12	 343 	65	459
MAT-SU	0	0	3	 o 	Į	0	14	 14 	3) 	12	 8 	0	0	2	! ! 	l	0	36	24
S.C.D.	5	291	18	 61 	8	 4 	52	i 98 	8	3	28	80	0	0	7	5	15	 353 	141	895
FAIRBANKS	18	 48,942 	4	1 100	4		18	 24		0	15	 172,008 	0	0	2	9	2	0	64	 221,084
DELTA	0	0	ı	 0 	3	l 84 	20	 20	0	0	3	31	0	0	0	0		0	28	135
N.C.D.	18	48,942 	5	100	7	 85 	38	44		0	18	172,039	0	0	2	 9 	3	0	92	221,219
S.E.D.	0	0		 7 	0	0	0	0	0		C	1 0	0	0	0	0	C)) 		7
TOTAL	23	 49,233 	24	 	15	 89 	90	 142 	9	3	46	 172,119 		- C	9	14	16	 353	234	222,121

* NOTE:

FALSE ALARM EXCLUDED, THIS CHART PERTAINS ONLY TO STATE LANDS (STATE PROTECTED).





* NOTE: THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE LANDS (STATE PROTECTED)

SIZE CLASS

1981

NUMBER OF FIRES AND ACRES BURNED *

-	LIGHT	TNING	HUN	MAN	TOT	TAL	
	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	NO.	ACRES	
ANCHORAGE	2	276	20	1 1 1	22	406	
COPPER RIVER	2	 	16	5 1	18	6	
KENAI	1	14	64	1 1 445	65	l l 459 l	
MAT-SU	0	0	36	24	36	l 24 	
S.C.D.	5	291	136	604	141	895	
FAIRBANKS	18	48,942	46	i i 172,142 !	58	221,084	
DELTA	0	0	28	135	28	! ! ! 35	
N.C.D.	18	48,942	74	172,277	92	221,219	
S.E.D.	0	0	ı	7	ı	 	
TOTAL	23	49,233	211	1 172,888	234	222,121	

* NOTE:

FALSE ALARMS EXCLUDED, THIS CHART PERTAINS ONLY TO STATE LANDS (STATE PROTECTED).

9

	STA	ATE	PRIV	/ATE	BORO	UGH_ CITY	NAT	IVE	В	_M	R	R.	MILI	TARY	U.S	.F.S.	US F.	8w.s	N.F	PS.	TOT	ΓAL
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NORTHCENTRAL DISTRICT	51	 221,169 	47	 48 	6	- - - -	0	0	6	36,452	0	0	9	 23,626 	0	0	0		·	0	120	 281,295
SOUTHEAST DISTRICT	2	7	0	 0 	0	 0 	0	0	0	0	0	0	C		O		C	 	C		2	 7
TOTAL	115	221,691	127	457	17		7	1 14	22	36,465	ı	0	IC	23,626	ı	0	C		5	13,006	305	 295260

* NOTE:

THIS CHART PERTAINS TO INDIVIDUAL LAND OWNERSHIP (STATE PROTECTED).

Ν.

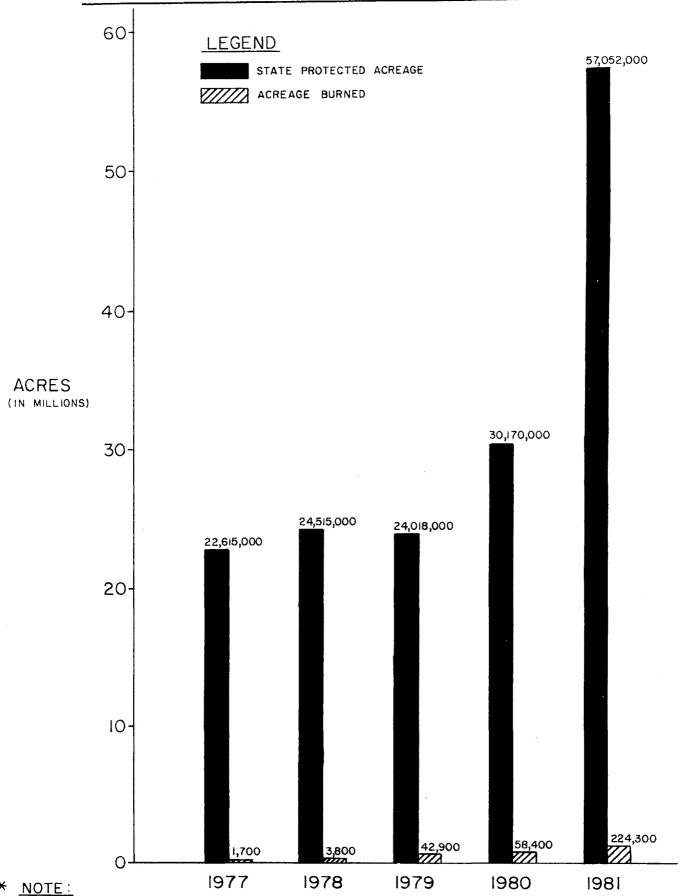
NUMBER OF FIRE INCIDENTS AND ACRES BURNED *

	LIGH	TNING	HUN	JMAN FALSE		ALARM	TO ⁻	ΓΑΙ	
	NO.	ACRES NO. ACRES		NO. ACRES		NO.	ACRES		
SOUTHCENTRAL DISTRICT	13	13,298 1	148	660	22	0	183	 13,958 	
NORTHCENTRAL DISTRICT	23	85,997	82	 	15	0	120	281,295	
SOUTHEAST DISTRICT	0	0	I	7	I	0	2	7	
TOTAL	36	99,295	231	 - - - - - 	38	0	305	295,260	

* NOTE:

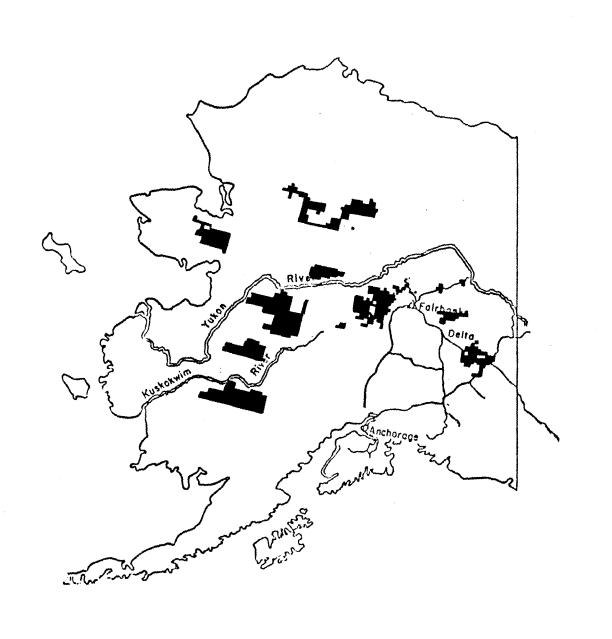
THIS CHART PERTAINS TO FEDERAL LANDS, (STATE PROTECTED).

STATE PROTECTED ACREAGE VS. ACRES BURNED



THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE & FEDERAL LANDS, STATE PROTECTED.

STATE LANDS WITH BLM PROTECTION 1981 FIRE ACTIVITY STATISTICS



SECTION C

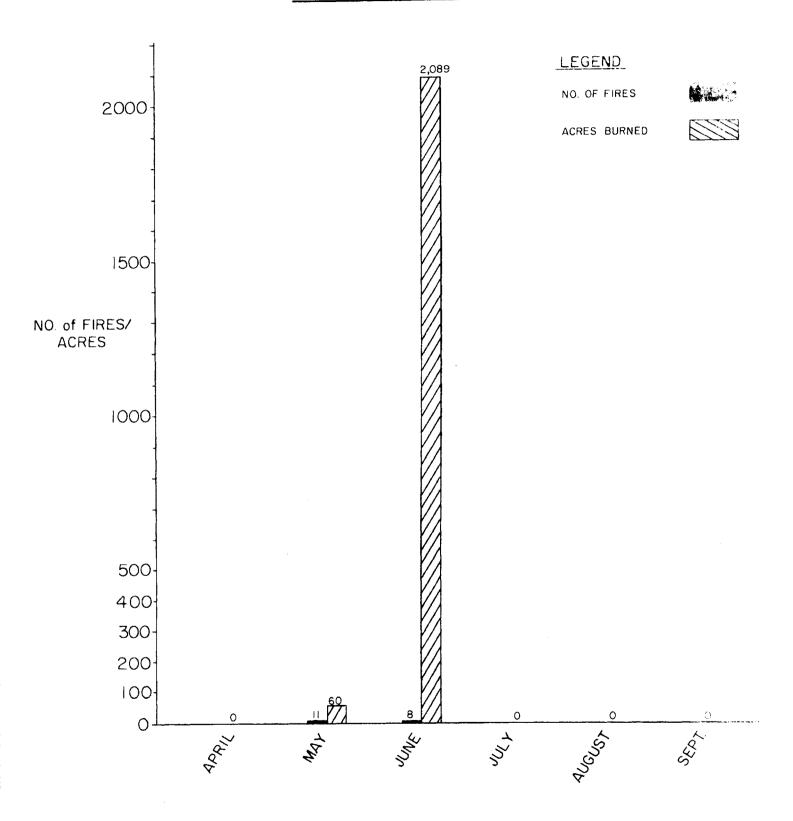
NUMBER OF FIRE INCIDENTS AND ACRES BURNED *

	LIGH1	NING	HUN	1AN	TOTAL		
	NUMBER ACRES		NUMBER ACRES		NUMBER	ACRES	
SOUTHCENTRAL DISTRICT	5	2,056	2	25	7	2,081	
NORTHCENTRAL DISTRICT	10	66	2	2	12	 68 	
TOTAL	15	2,122	4	27	19	i 1 2,149	

* NOTE:

THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE LANDS BLM PROTECTED.

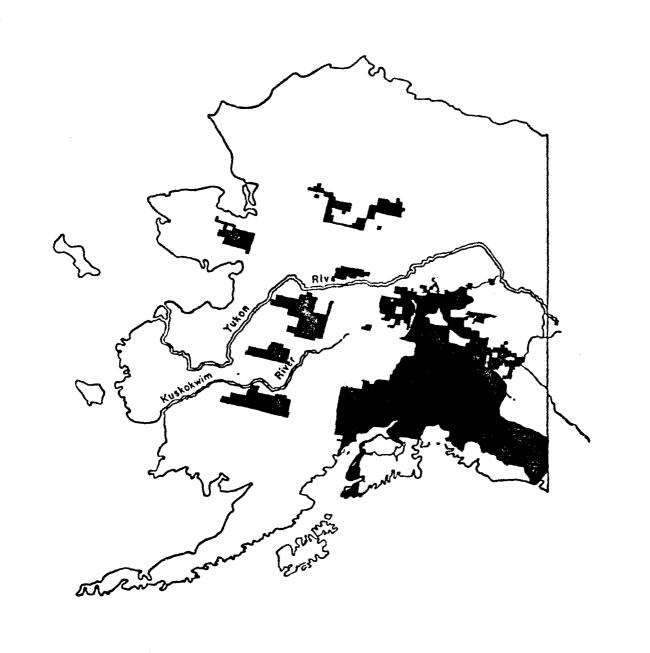
NUMBER OF FIRES AND ACRES BURNED *



* NOTE:

THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE LANDS, BLM PROTECTED.

1981 SUPPRESSION EXPENDITURES



SECTION D

1981 WILDFIRE SEASON SUPPRESSION EXPENDITURES

Southcentral District

Supplies	Aircraft	Mampowerr
\$517,059	\$516,454	\$1,128,778

Northcentral District

Supplies	Aircraft	Manpower
\$770,853	\$2,088,139	\$2,501,091

Southeast District

Supplies	Aircraft	Manpower
0	0	\$600

Total State suppression expenditures

Supplies	Aircraft	Manpower
\$1,287,912	\$2,604,593	\$3,630,469

Total expenditures \$7,522,974

EXPENDITURES BROKEN INTO AREAS

Anchorage Area	-	\$ 173,429
Copper River Area	-	1,660,643
Kenai Area	-	247,726
Mat-Su Area	-	80,439
Southcentral District	-	\$2,162,291
Fairbanks Area	-	\$5,286,346
Delta Area	-	73,737
Northcentral District	-	\$5,360,083
Haines Area	-	\$600
Southeast District	-	\$600
Total State		\$7,522,974

TOTAL FIRES AND EXPENDITURES PER SIZE CLASS *

	A 0−.25		B C .26-9.9 10-99		D 100-299		E 300-999		F 1000-4999		G 5000 +			
	NO.	COST	NO.	COST	NO.	COST	NO.	COST	NO.	COST	NO.	COST	NO.	COST
SOUTHCENTRAL DISTRICT	84	27 ,4 00	32	134 , 800	7	247,600	1	7,100		97,800	0	0	ſ	
NORTHCENTRAL DISTRICT	35	25,600	30	 110,200 	8	70,400	l	194,400	0	 0 	2	 00e,818 	3	
SOUTHEAST DISTRICT	0	 0 	1	 	0	 0 	0	 0	0	 	0	0	0	
TOTAL	119	53,000	63	 245,400 	15	1 1 318,000 1	2	201,500		 97,800 	2	1 813,900	4	 5,759,100

* NOTE:

- I. THIS CHART PERTAINS TO STATE & FEDERAL LANDS, STATE PROTECTED.
- 2. THIS CHART EXCLUDES FALSE ALARM & NO ACTION FIRES.
- 3. ZERO INDICATES THERE WERE NO FIRES IN THAT SIZE CLASS.
- 4. SIZE CLASS "A" THROUGH "G" AT TOP OF EACH COLUMN INDICATES ACRES.

COST PER SIZE CLASS * 1981 FIRE SEASON

