

Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection



2025 Fire Program Briefing



STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION MISSION AND VISION

Alaska's Fire Protection Program Mission

Safely manage wildland fires that pose a threat to life, property, and critical infrastructure on 150 million acres of land throughout the State of Alaska.



Alaska's Fire Protection Program Vision

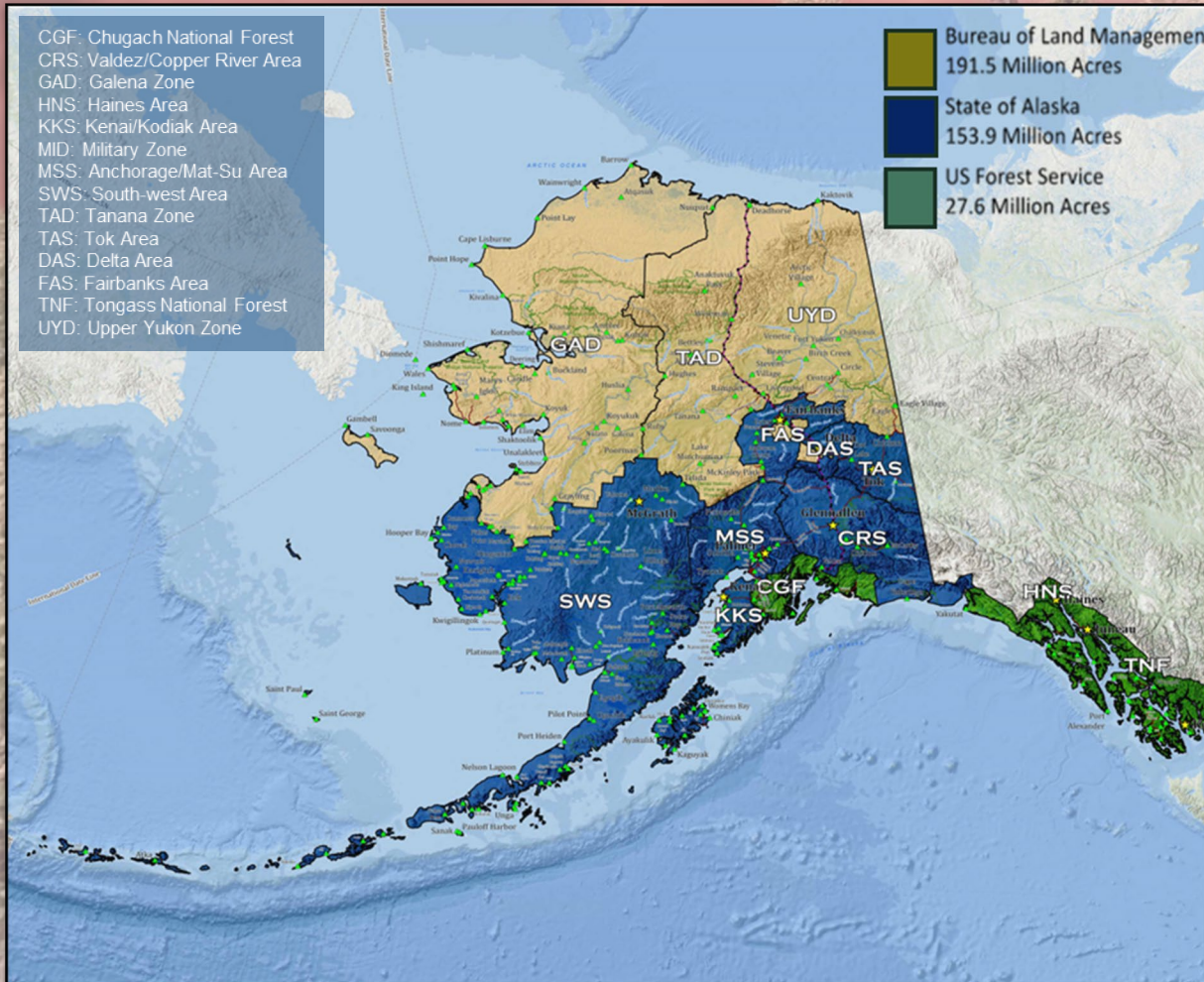
DOF envisions that by investing in the fire programs four primary functions, *preparedness, prevention, mitigation, suppression*, we will benefit Alaskans. Our communities will be fire adapted and prepared, human caused fires will be reduced, and we will have a well-trained and available workforce which will reduce suppression costs and provide increased public safety.



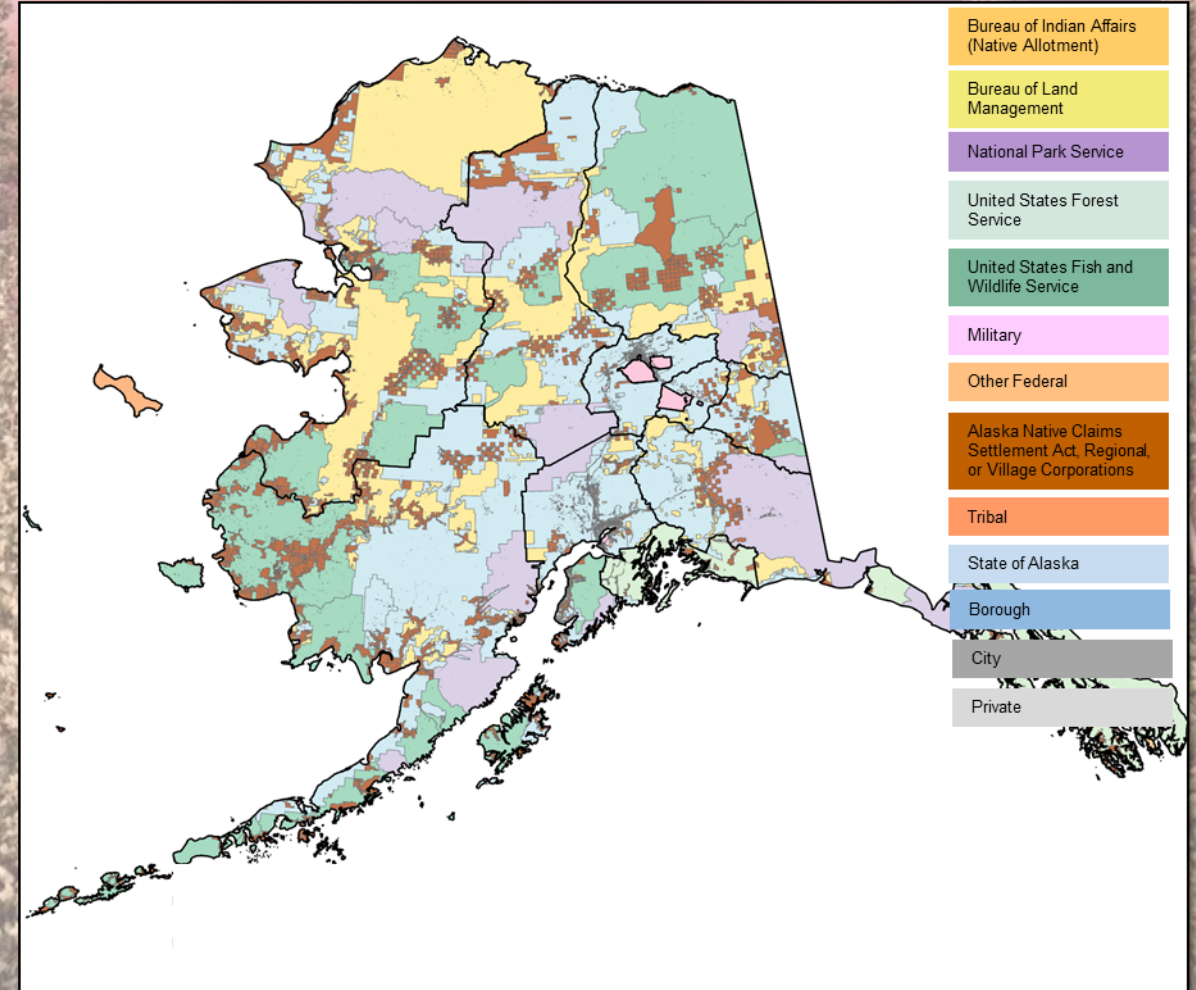
STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

Protection Agencies

Division of Forestry and Fire Protection (DOF) protects 154 million acres – includes almost all the roadside areas of the state (where most Alaskans live)



Jurisdictional Agencies





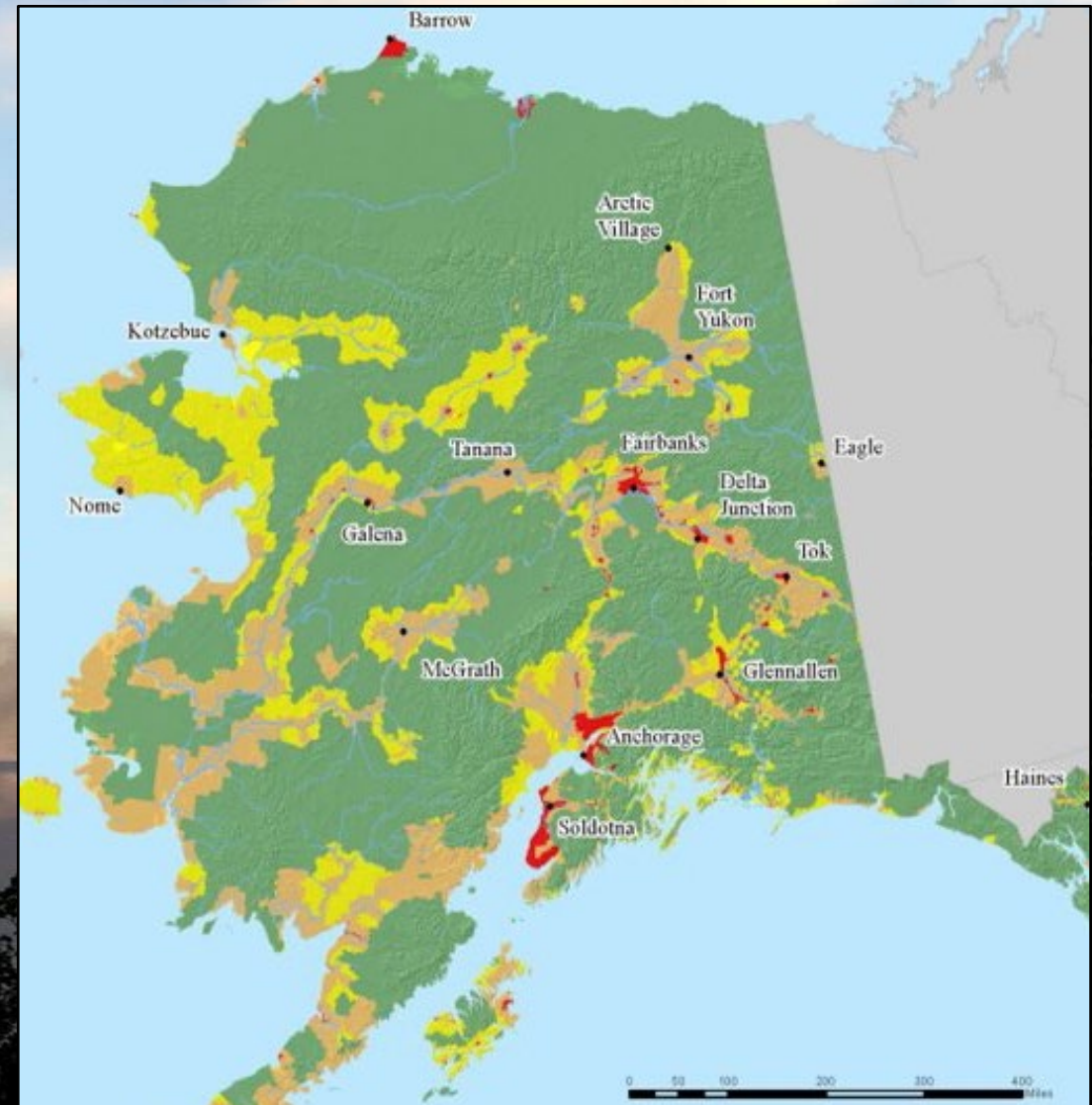
STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION ALASKA INTERAGENCY FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Critical: The highest priority for suppression actions; includes Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas and other locations where there is an immediate threat to human life, primary residences, and critical infrastructure

Full: High priority, but below critical; encompasses cultural sites, administrative sites, cabins, and high-value natural resources

Modified: Designed to balance acres burned with suppression costs and to accomplish land and resource management objectives when conditions are favorable

Limited: The lowest priority for fire-related resource assignments; intended for broad, landscape-scale areas where fire best performs its ecological role





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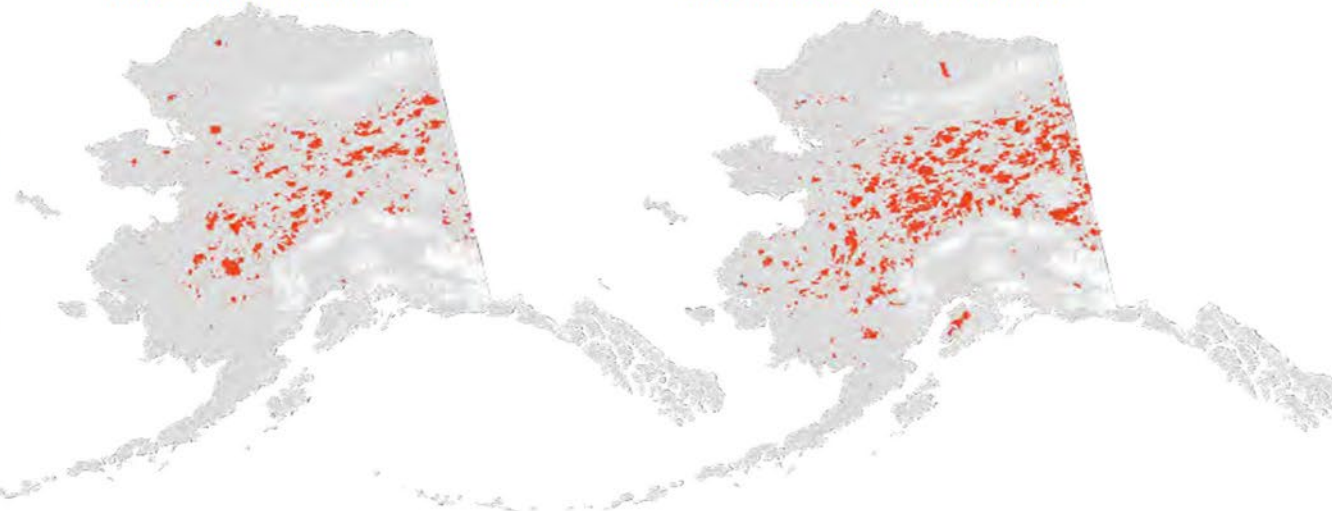
ALASKA CHANGING WILDFIRE ENVIRONMENT

MORE AREA BURNED

Nearly twice as much area burned from 2004–2023 compared to the two decades prior. On average about 2,500 square miles burn each year now compared to about 1,275 square miles during the 1984–2003 period. Over this recent period, Western Alaska and the Kenai Peninsula have seen more fires.

1984–2003 area burned

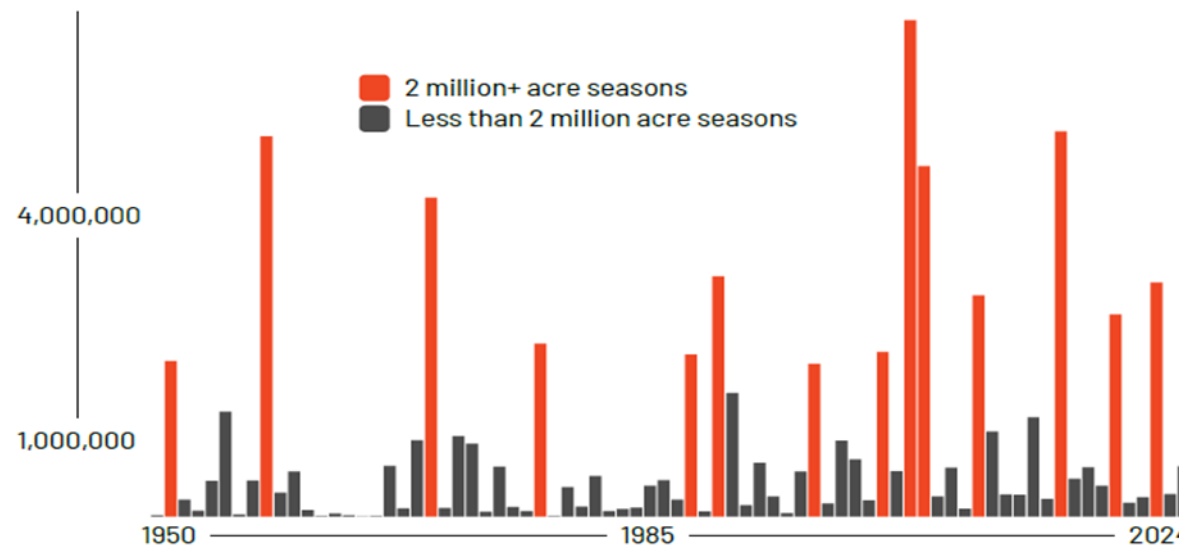
Recent 2004–2023 area burned



LARGE SEASONS DOUBLED

Alaska is experiencing more wildfire, and severe fire seasons, when over two million acres burn, are twice as common as they were 30 years ago.

7,000,000 acres burned in Alaska



Paul Ollig, National Park Service

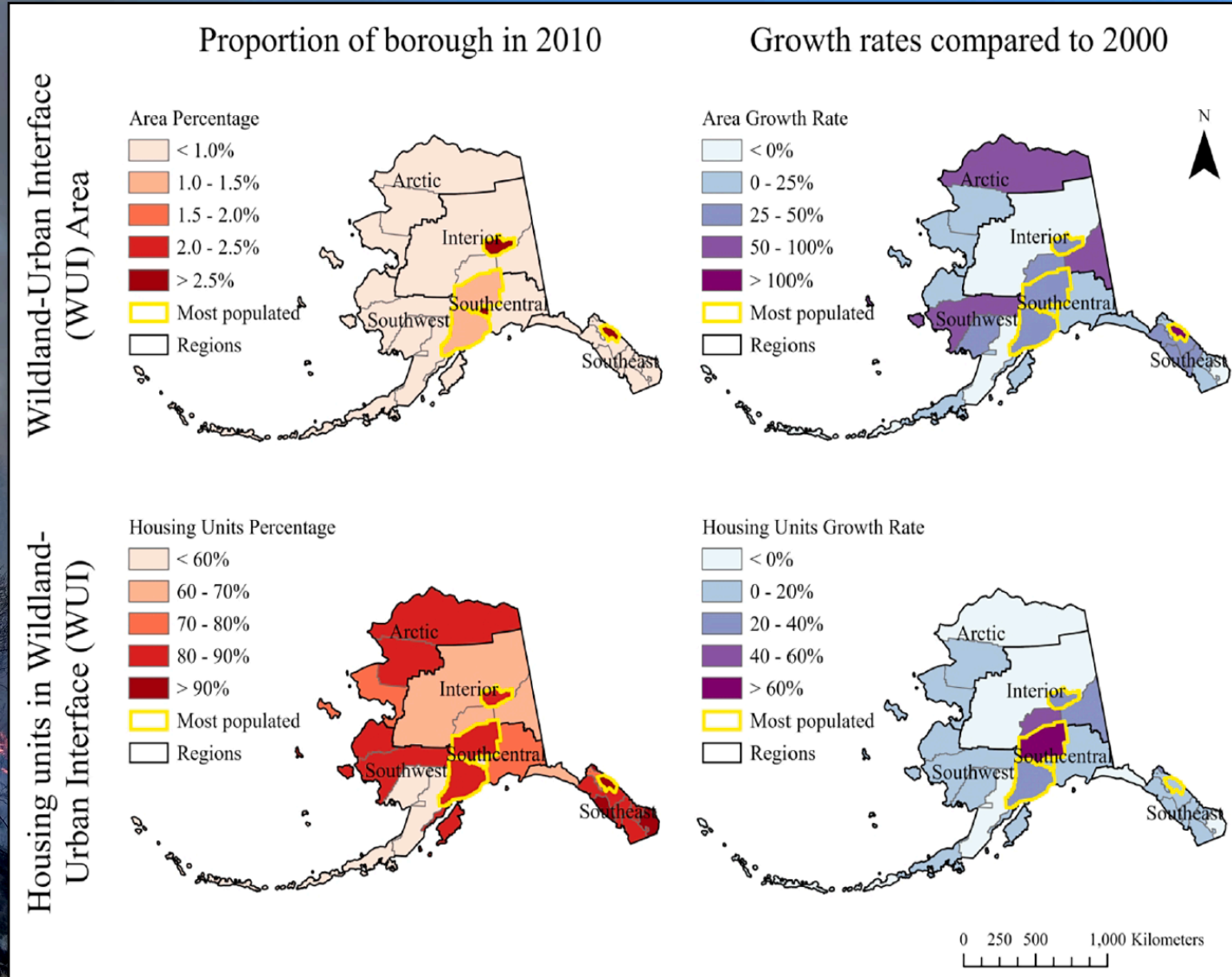


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ALASKA GROWING WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE

- **73.5%** of Alaska's total housing units located in WUI zones
- **85%** of newly constructed housing units are being built in WUI zones
- **16.4%**: Alaska's population increase from 2000 (627,963) to 2020 (731,158)
- **5th**: Alaska ranks fifth nationally for state with highest percentage of housing units in WUI zones

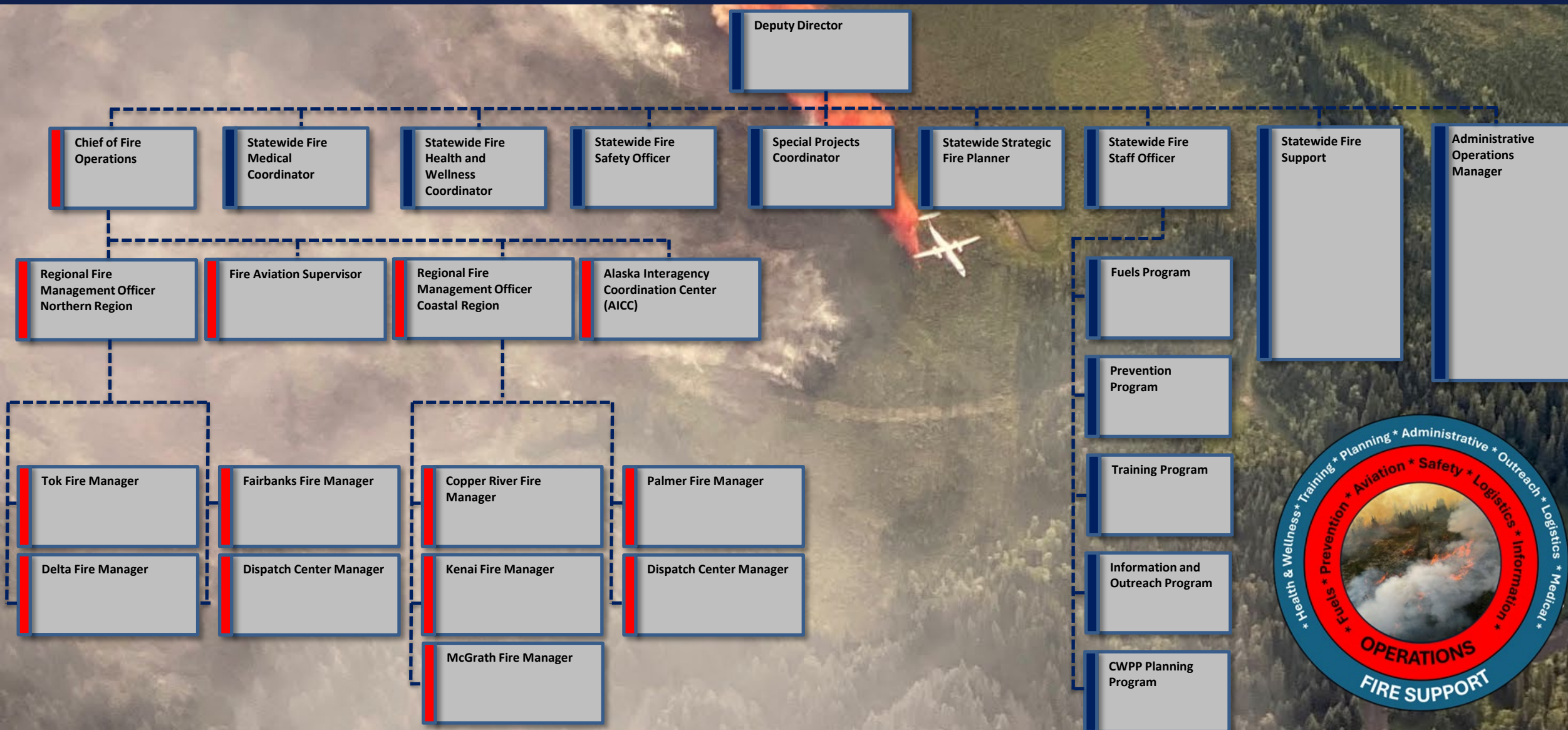




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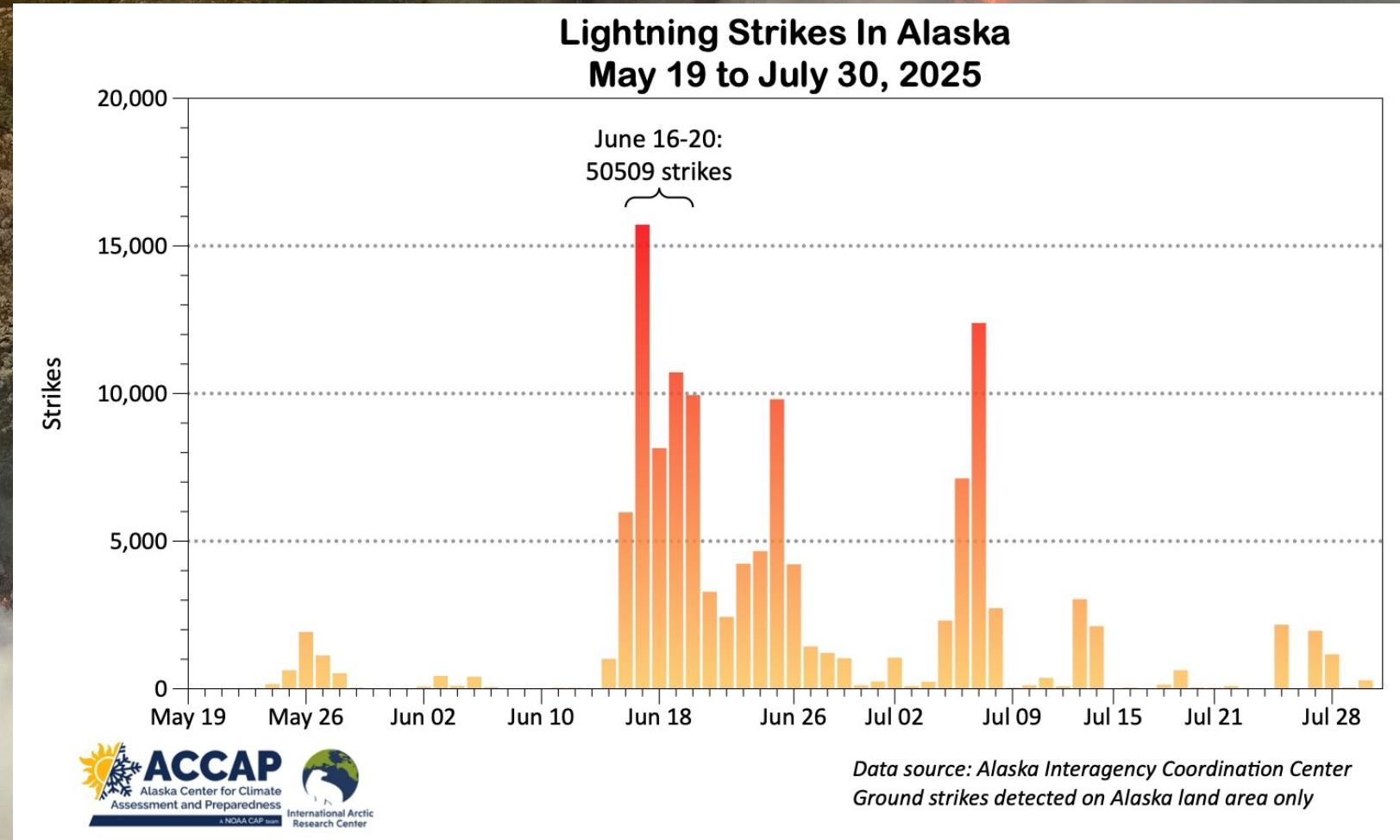
FIRE PROTECTION PROGRAM: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE





STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION 2025 FIRE SEASON

- From June 15 to June 21, **173 new fires were reported** caused by approximately **54,800 lightning strikes**.
- Thunderstorms on June 19 sparked multiple fires, including Bear Creek, Himalaya, Nenana Ridge, Saint George Creek, and Bonnifield Creek in the Fairbanks area.
- The lightening event was followed by **Red Flag conditions** from June 21 through June 22 which led to extreme fire behavior and rapid growth.





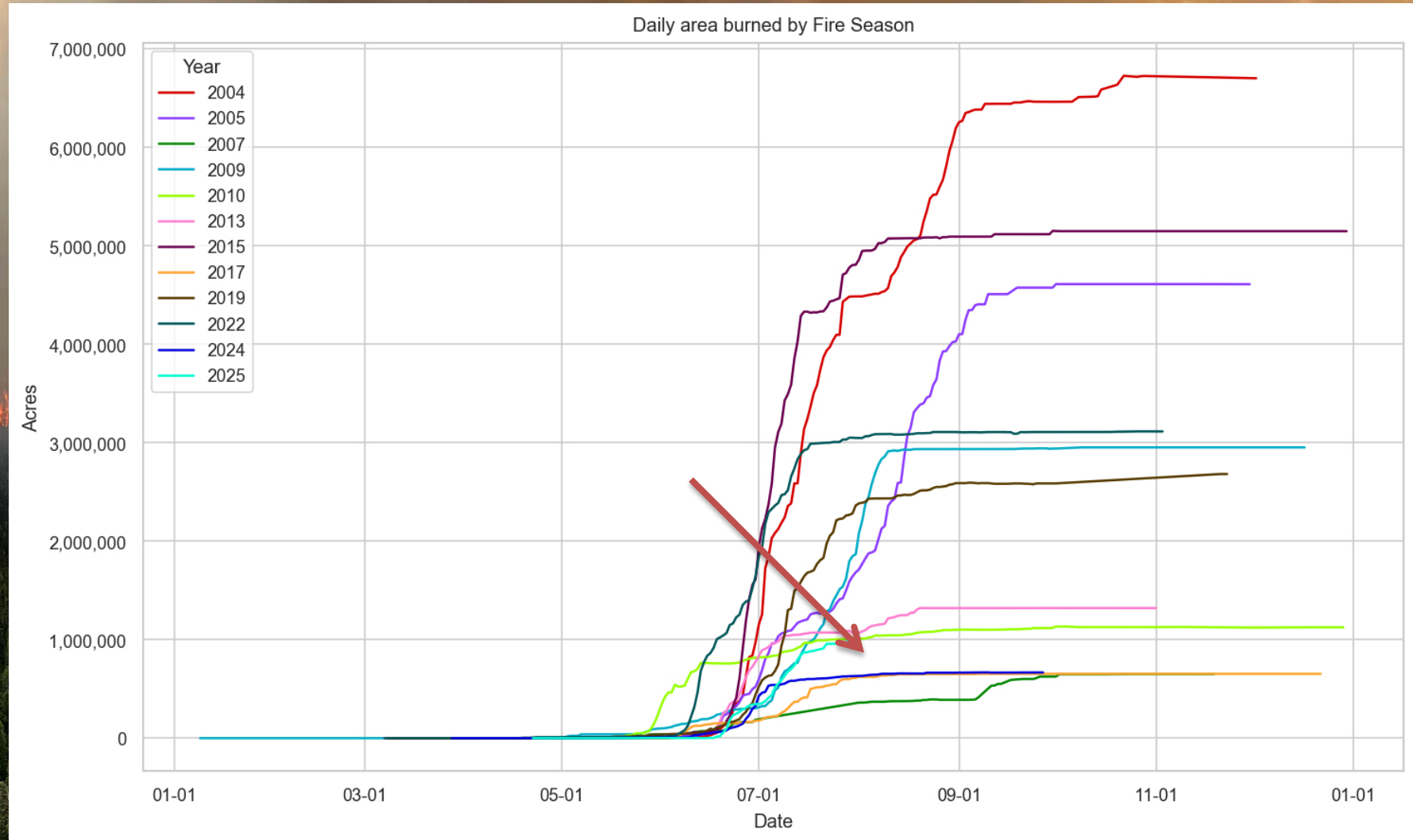
STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION 2025 FIRE SEASON

As of August 18, 2025, Alaska has reported:

- **430 wildfires &**
- **1,004,664 ac burned**
- 200 under federal protection
- 215 under state protection
- *False Alarms count as fire numbers

This figure is right at the 20-year average of one million acres burned annually.

Acres Burned in Alaska by Date & Fire Season





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SEASON OVERVIEW AND SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Season Statistics

- 415 total wildfires (200 federal, 215 state protection)
- 1,004,664.2 acres affected, surpassing 20-year average of 1 million acres.
- Season began slowly despite low snowpack in Southcentral Alaska.
- Only 38 fires recorded in first half of June (lowest since records began in 1993).

Major Weather Events

- Rapid shift in weather patterns in second week of June
- Significantly higher temperatures north of Alaska Range
- Multiple days of intense lightning activity.
- June 15-21 weather surge: 173 new fires from ~54,800 lightning strikes.
- Red Flag conditions (June 21-22) led to extreme fire behavior.

March 2025

Early fire season declared

Fire season was declared in March 2025 due to low snowpack and predicted high fire danger across the southern half of Alaska

June 14, 2025

Oskawalik Fire

First significant fire of the year, located six miles downriver from Crooked Creek on the Kuskokwim River. Threatened private property and high value timber, burning 1,779 acres

June 19, 2025

Multiple Lightning-Caused Fires

Thunderstorms sparked Bear Creek, Himalaya, Nenana Ridge, Saint George Creek, and Bonnifield Creek fires in the Fairbanks area

June 21-22, 2025

Red Flag Conditions

Extreme fire behavior and rapid growth endangered communities along Parks Highway including Clear, Healy and Anderson. Fairbanks neighborhoods and critical infrastructure were at risk from Himalaya Fire

Traffic Delays

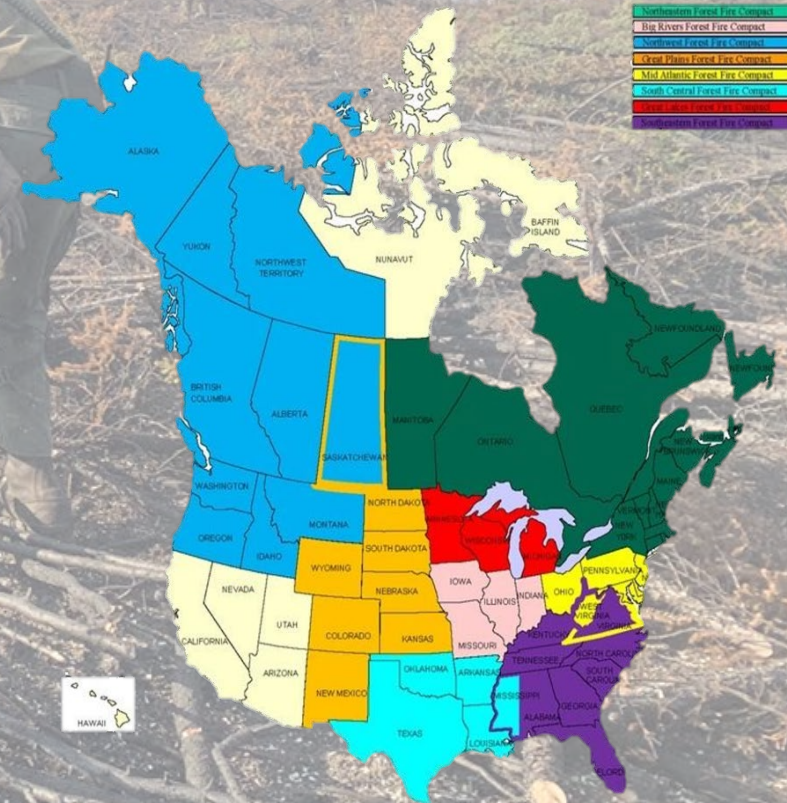
The Bear Creek and Nenana Ridge fires crossed and temporarily closed the Parks Hwy, causing traffic delays for over 14 days. Just under 400 Alaskans were evacuated from their homes in Fairbanks, Healy, and Tok



STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION AGREEMENTS AND COMPACTS

When importing firefighting resources, the State can utilize three different agreements/compacts that outlines billing methods and procedures.

- **State to State Agreements:** When utilizing “state to state” agreements, Alaska and the other states bill each other for firefighting effort expenses
- **Northwest Compact (NWC):** When utilizing the NWC agreement, parties bill each other for fire suppression efforts
 - Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Yukon Territories, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Hawaii
- **Alaska Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement:** When utilizing the master agreement, the national ordering system is used
 - Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Fire Service, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs





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IMPACT AND RESPONSE

Community Impact

- 34 residences and critical infrastructure damaged or destroyed
- Power lines, fiber optic lines and cell towers affected
- Recovery efforts ongoing
- 276 miles of fire lines constructed to protect Alaskan values
- Suppression repair efforts continuing through fall
- Park Highway closed for 2 weeks, causing intermittent traffic flow.
- Evacuated over 200 Alaska residents (Fairbanks, Anderson , and Tok)

Resources Mobilized

- Incidents strained firefighting resources
- Alaska DOF imported over 4,300 firefighters and fire support personnel
- 250 miles of hose issues from the warehouse
- 4872 fresh food boxes issued or 40,000 days of food delivered for fire line workers.
- MOB Center (UAF) hosted 1,300 nights and provided 2000 meals for troops arriving and departing Alaska.
- Resources obtained through:
 - Northwest Compact
 - State to State agreements
 - National ordering system



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2025 FIRE COSTS

Initial Attack

- Initial Attack Overview
 - Initial attack refers to the first response to a wildfire, aiming to suppress it quickly before it grows.
 - These operations typically involve small crews, minimal equipment, and short-duration efforts.
- Cost Range and Factors
 - Fires costing up to \$10K are generally small, quickly contained, and require limited resources.
- Why These Fires Stay Low-Cost
 - Rapid detection and response prevent escalation.
 - Minimal acreage burned—often under 10 acres.
 - No need for extended operations, evacuations, or complex logistics.
- Example: 184 initial attack, \$413,000 (\$2244 average)

Extended Attack

- Extended Attack Defined
 - Extended attack occurs when a wildfire isn't contained during the initial response and requires additional resources and time.
 - These fires may burn for several days and span larger areas, often exceeding 100 acres.
- Cost Range and Factors
 - Fires costing up to \$300K are generally medium sized, quickly contained within days, and require fewer resources.
- Cost Drivers
 - Costs rise due to prolonged operations, increased personnel, and specialized equipment.
 - May involve multiple agencies coordinating efforts, which adds complexity and expense.
- Example: 39 extended attack fires, \$9.8 Million (\$230,000 average)

Complex

- Complex Fire Defined
 - A complex fire involves multiple wildfires managed under a single incident command due to proximity or resource needs.
 - These fires often span thousands of acres and require weeks or even months to fully contain.
- Cost Range and Factors
 - Fires costing up to \$20 million
- Major Cost Drivers
 - Extensive use of resources, hundreds to thousands of personnel, including federal, state, and local agencies, logistics for fire camps: food, sanitation, medical support, fuel, and communications.
- Example:
 - Bear Creek Fire: \$12.5 Million
 - Nenana Ridge Complex: \$10.8 Million
 - Himalaya: \$20.9 Million
 - *Protected \$560 Million in Alaskan Investments



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KEY SUCCESSES AND COLLABORATIONS

Fuel Breaks Effectiveness

- Fuel breaks continue to prove their value in protecting Alaskan communities and reducing suppression costs. Between 2022 and 2025, fuel breaks have been used as an operational tool on wildfires in Delta, Tok, Mat-Su, Kenai Peninsula, Western Alaska Communities and Fairbanks.

Staffing Improvements

- Mission-critical incentive pay significantly reduced staffing vacancies across the Division, enabling faster, more aggressive initial attack responses. Increased staffing and strong aviation/ground coordination led to multiple successful catches on fires that threatened communities and infrastructure.

Successful Evacuations

- Evacuations were successfully coordinated by DOF initial attack resources at multiple high-risk incidents including Bear Creek, Himalaya Road, Bonanza Creek, 7 Mile Lookout, and Bonnifield (near Gold King Airstrip). No lives were lost.

During peak operations, the Division activated emergency protocols statewide and demonstrated strong interagency coordination with multiple boroughs, Alaska State Troopers, State EOCs, Alaska State Parks, DOT, Federal Cooperators, and Volunteer Fire Departments.



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2026 STRATEGIC ACTION ITEMS- WHERE DO INVEST?

Fire UAS Aircraft

- Enhances Fire response: aerial ignition, IR imaging, mapping, situational awareness
- Increase efficiency and cost savings
- Interoperability with States, Federal, and Tribal
- UAS Pilot (UASP) qualifications for 15 people
- 2 modules of qualified UASP and UAS Aerial Ignition (UASAI)

Modernizing Aviation

- Replace aging Turbo Commanders with Beechcraft King Air BE200 multi-mission platforms offering improved efficiency, lower operating costs, and seamless integration with existing personnel and partner agencies.
- Maximized utility
- Enhanced recruitment and retention
- Maintenance and logistics cost efficiencies
- Advance multi-mission capabilities

Staffing to PL 3

- Strengthen our firefighting capabilities and meet minimum staffing requirements for Preparedness Level 3 (PL-3), which corresponds to moderate/high wildland fire conditions.
- This is part of a multi-phased, proactive strategy to ensure Alaska is equipped to protect lives, property, and critical infrastructure from the growing threat of wildfire. By enhancing readiness, this investment will also help reduce costs to residents and businesses, improve firefighter and public safety, and safeguard the state's economic resilience.



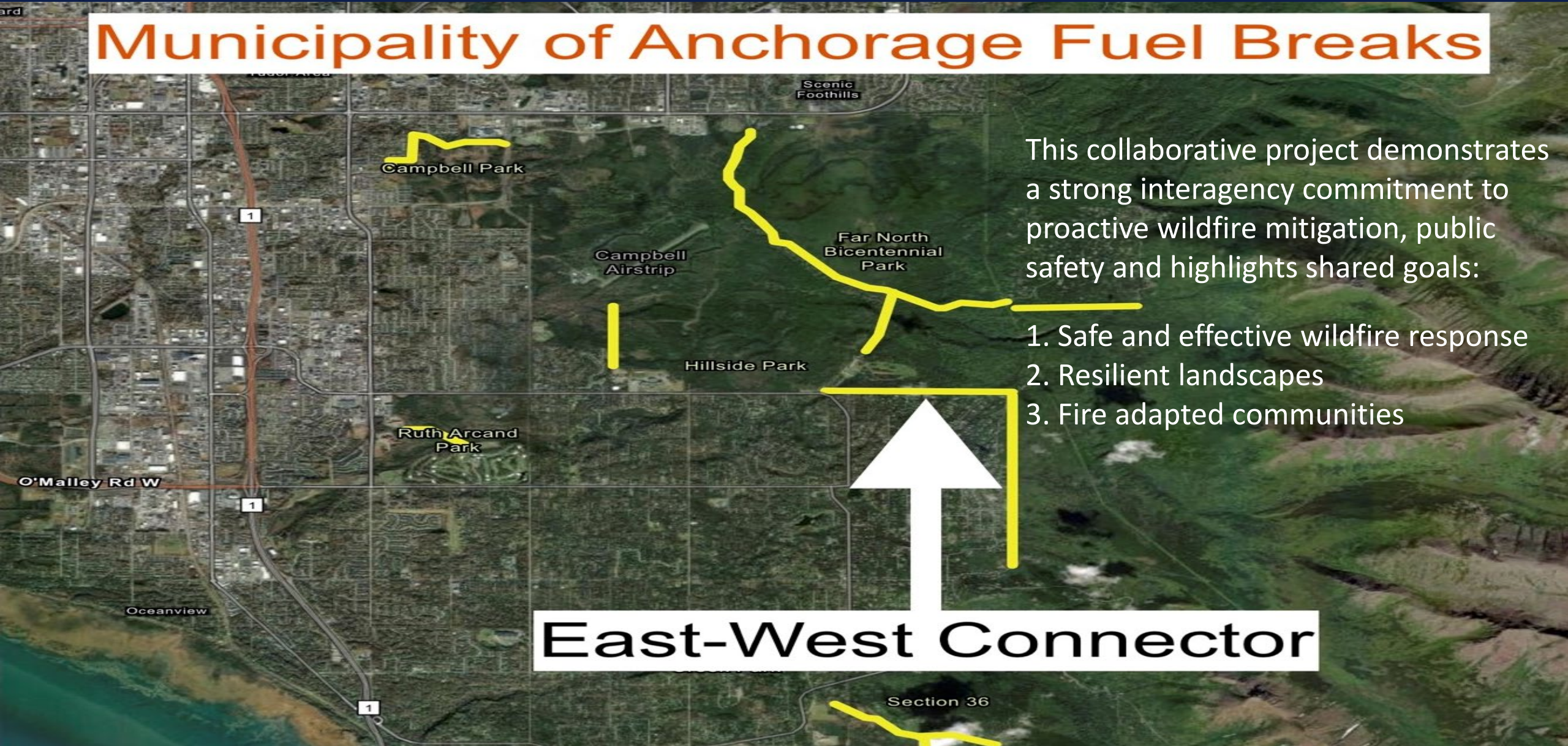
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2025 FUELS UPDATE

Municipality of Anchorage Fuel Breaks

This collaborative project demonstrates a strong interagency commitment to proactive wildfire mitigation, public safety and highlights shared goals:

1. Safe and effective wildfire response
2. Resilient landscapes
3. Fire adapted communities

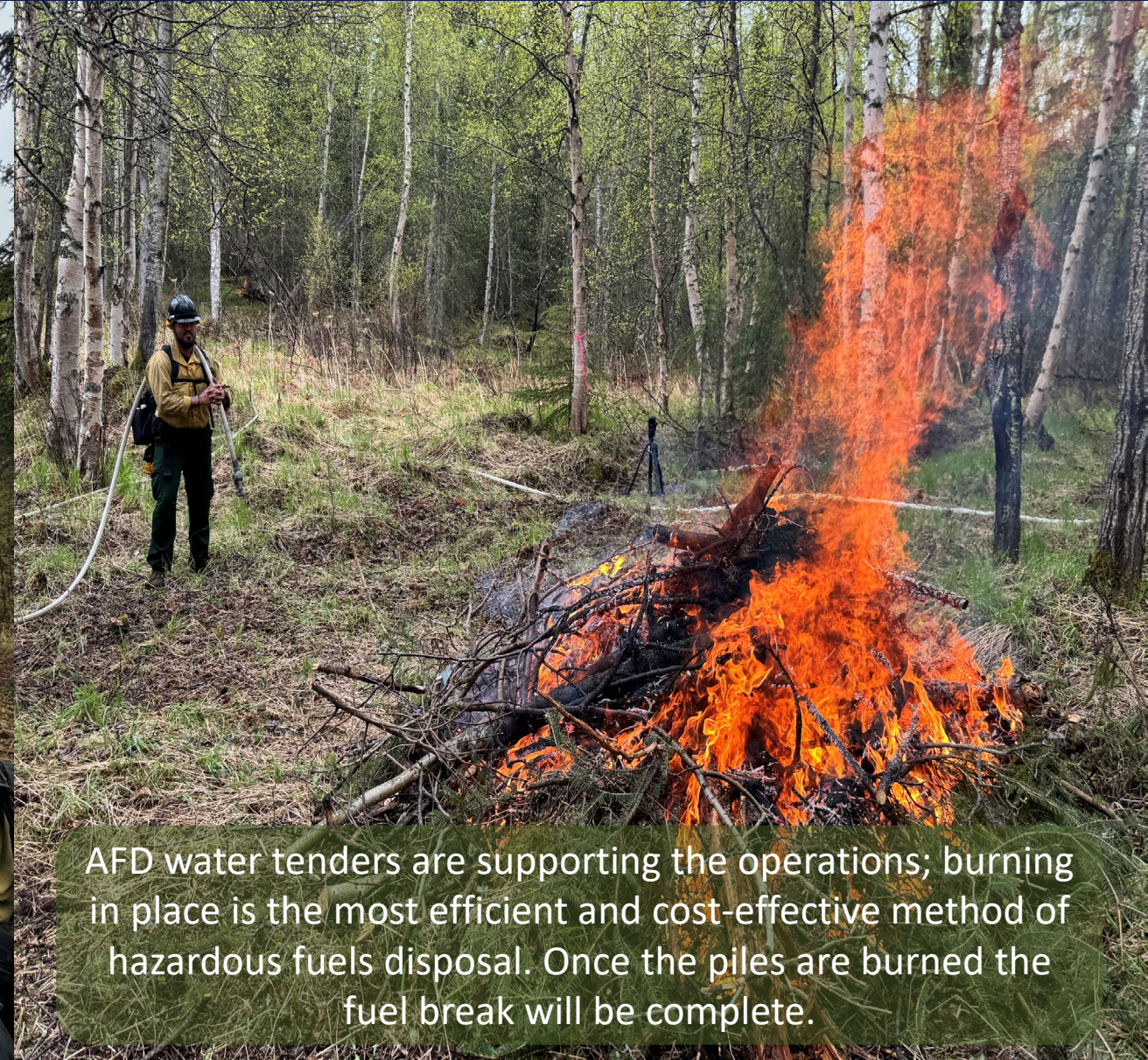
East-West Connector





STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION ALASKA'S 2025 SEASONAL OUTLOOK

Pile burning by more than 40 FFTs on the project commenced 5/12, are providing 24-hour coverage, and will continue across the 1.21 mile long 200' wide fuel break, spanning 35 total acres.



AFD water tenders are supporting the operations; burning in place is the most efficient and cost-effective method of hazardous fuels disposal. Once the piles are burned the fuel break will be complete.



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2026 STRATEGIC ACTION ITEMS GOV BUDGET

Overall Fuels Update

- 30+ active fuels projects
- 2025 Spotlight: East-West Connector Fuel Break (1.25 miles, 40 acres, completed May 30)
- CWPP development and utility corridor protection
- Emergency Firefighter (EFF) workforce development through fuels projects
- 10 new Community Wildfire Defense Grant applications underway
- Partnerships expanding with utilities (e.g., Homer Electric)

Coastal Region

- Coastal Region (Mat-Su, Kenai, Copper River/Valdez, Southwest):
 - Launch Susitna North thinning, Hilltop Road, Potters Marsh, Stuckagain Heights
 - Palmer Hay Flats fuel break & prescribed burn
 - Expand Kenai & Kodiak thinning projects; Glennallen CWPP retreatments
 - McGrath, Takotna, Nikolai, Telida CWPPs & fuel breaks

Northern Region

- Northern Region (Fairbanks, Delta, Tok, Recreation Areas):
 - Keystone Neighborhood Fuel Break & Freeman Road project
 - Bison habitat prescribed fire; new CWPPs
 - Fuel breaks used as operational tools (2022–2025)
 - Impact: Fuel breaks reduce suppression costs, protect communities, and build firefighter capacity through training linked to mitigation.



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QUESTIONS

An aerial photograph of a vast forest fire. A massive, dark plume of smoke rises from the horizon, partially obscuring the sky. The foreground is a dense, green forest. The word "QUESTIONS" is overlaid in large, blue, outlined letters with a yellow glow effect.

QUESTIONS