

AFS FIRELINE

A BLM Alaska Fire Service Newsletter

BLM

Alaska Fire Season 2005—Another Record-Breaking Year

By Maggie Rogers
AFS Public Affairs Office

The 2005 fire season set a record this year for the third highest number of acres burned in Alaska. For the second year in a row, conditions lined up the right combination of dry weather and ignitions from lightning strikes to result in another large, long-lasting fire season.

On Sept. 1, 2005, the number of acres burned in Alaska became greater than that of 1969, which had been the third largest fire season (4.01 million acres burned) since reliable records began in the 1950s. With over 4.5 million acres burned this season, and 6.59 million acres burned in summer of 2004, two of the top-three fire seasons have happened in two consecutive years.



Above the Fox Creek Fire in July. The Fox Creek Fire was one of 625 wild-land fires this fire season. In all, some 4.57 million acres burned across the state of Alaska—making '05 the third largest fire season since reliable records were kept in the '50s. Photo: Jim Hall

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Similar to 2004, May 2005 was wet, followed by significant warming and drying in June. According to the National Weather Service, May has drier weather with conditions getting progressively wetter into June, July and August. Another factor that greatly influenced fire behavior and growth in 2005 was the presence of persistent, strong high-pressure ridges over Alaska. Lightning storms that took place on the edges of these ridges provided ignitions and as conditions warmed and dried, the fires grew.

Despite the rainy May, fire season started early

for the State of Alaska Division of Forestry with two extended-attack, staffed fires. One was human-caused on the Kenai Peninsula and started on April 29, while the other was a lightning-caused fire, about 45 miles south-east of Northway, which started on May 10. Alaska Fire

Service did not have staffed fires that required much beyond initial attack until mid-June when the Sheenjek River Fire started, 25 miles northeast of Fort Yukon.

Fire starts and activity increased until the end of July when there was a period of cooler, wetter weather. Due to decreased fire behavior and damp conditions, resources were pulled off fires. Toward the beginning of August, high pressure returned with hot, dry weather. Activity increased due to the addition of new fires and early dormant fires that once again became active.

Sept. 1, 2005, was not only the day that the total acreage burned pushed this fire season into the third largest on record, it was also the first day that no fires were staffed and all were in monitor status. Historically since 1950, there hasn't been two years in a row with over 2 million acres burned until 2004 and 2005. The past two years have certainly made their mark in Alaska's recent fire history.

Standing	Year	Acres burned
1	2004	6.59 million
2	1957	5.06 million
3	2005	4.60 million
4	1969	4.01 million
5	1990	3.18 million

ALASKA FIRE SERVICE



AFS Manager's Corner

This has been a very challenging follow-up season to the record-breaking 2004 fire season in Alaska. The season started very early with activity on the Kenai and continued late into the season across the Interior. I would like to thank our partners, friends, and especially our employees and their families for the commitment and support they have given to the Alaska Fire Service.

Filled with major accomplishments, this fire season has assuredly been a success. With 625 fires actively burning 4.57 million acres across the state, resources were thin but we accomplished our mission professionally.

In AFS protection alone, we supported some 220 fires and we did it safely with no loss of life or major injury. This is a tremendous accomplishment for any organization operating in a complex fire suppression environment and I thank everyone for their efforts in promoting safety.

Another success this year was the dedication of the AFS Barracks on Fort Wainwright. Started as little more than a wish several years ago, the project became a reality through the committed partnership among the BLM, the U.S. Army, and private industry when BLM Director Kathleen Clarke and State Director Henri Bisson dedicated the new facility on July 10.

This year also saw another key success when Alaska State Director Henri Bisson signed the BLM Land Use Plan Amendment for Wildland Fire and Fuels Management in Alaska. Known as the Fire Amendment, this action defines and identifies overall wildland fire and fuels management direction to achieve BLM land use and resource management objectives while emphasizing public and firefighter safety as the highest priority for all BLM fire management activities.

Again, congratulations to all for helping us make this a safe and successful year.

Scott Billing, Manager



BLM Director Dedicates Alaska Fire Service Barracks

*By Maggie Rogers
AFS Public Affairs Office*

A vision became a reality on July 10 when Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Kathleen Clarke dedicated the new Alaska Fire Service (AFS) barracks on Fort Wainwright, Alaska. She was joined by BLM Alaska State Director Henri Bisson, Executive Officer for the Garrison Commander Rich Mauer, and Business Development Manager for Butler Construction Hal Meeder to commemorate the completion of one of the Department of the Interior's largest fire facility construction projects in recent years.

Clarke was also joined by AFS Manager Scott Billing who said, "It has been a long process to get this facility established [not only] for the folks that work for AFS, but also for

all the fire communities in the Lower-48 that do come to Alaska to help us accomplish our mission throughout the summer."

The barracks house personnel and firefighting crews from Alaska and the Lower-48 from mid-February through mid-November. While AFS's other facilities are fully functional, the housing previously provided for crews and personnel dated back to the 1940s.

Henri Bisson commented that "fire season is the ultimate test for BLM employees. Frequently we have employees from other states help us during the Alaska fire season. We can now provide them with clean housing when they are not actually on the fireline."



Director of BLM Kathleen Clarke, right, cuts the ceremonial cake with AFS Manager Scott Billing during the ceremony on July 10 dedicating the AFS barracks on Fort Wainwright. Photo: Doug Stockdale

*Editor's Note:
The new AFS Barracks housed over 1,676 personnel during this year's fire season.*

Month	Personnel Housed
June	354
July	750
August	572

BLM Completes Wildland Fire and Fuels Management Amendment *Ensures Life and Property Protection while Optimizing Ability to Achieve Objectives*

By Kevin McIver, PAO
and Mary Lynch, Planning &
Environmental Coordinator

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) State Director Henri Bisson announced this summer that the BLM has completed the planning analysis initiated in October 2003 to update wildland fire and fuels management for all BLM-managed lands statewide.

The BLM Land Use Plan Amendment for Wildland Fire and Fuels Management in Alaska (Fire Amendment) defines and identifies the overall wildland fire and fuels management direction to achieve BLM land use and resource management objectives, while emphasizing public and firefighter safety as the highest

priority for all BLM fire management activities.

The Decision Record which is the final document completed in the BLM planning process was signed following an extensive review. The environmental assessment was completed early last summer and a Finding of No Significant Impact was signed in July 2004.

The implementing decision record was initially expected last September but, due to the record-breaking 2004 fire season in Alaska, Bisson delayed

signing to allow the BLM time to evaluate and affirm that BLM policies and procedures adequately address issues and concerns identified by the public at community meetings held

in the fall of 2004. Also reviewed were issues identified during agency and interagency fire season critiques.

"This amendment reinforces the BLM's com-

mitment to support the Alaska interagency wildland fire program," said Bisson. "It will allow us to consider the latest available technology and methods, and encourage scientific research to study fire effects and

improve business practices."

The BLM through its membership in the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group will continue its efforts to cooperate and collaborate with other federal and State land managers and suppression organizations to address issues and concerns related to wildland fire management in Alaska and implement operational resolutions.

To download a copy of the Fire Amendment please visit <http://fire.ak.blm.gov> and click on the "Fire Planning" link, then the "Land Use Plan Amendment." Or for more information, email BLM Alaska Fire Service Planning & Environmental Coordinator Mary Lynch at Mary_Lynch@ak.blm.gov.

"This amendment reinforces the BLM's commitment to support the Alaska interagency wildland fire program."

Henri Bisson
BLM Alaska State Director

Joint Fire Science Program Board Visits Alaska Fire Service



On Sept. 12, the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) Board visited Fort Wainwright. Left, board members discuss the Caribou-Poker Creek Research Watershed Demonstration Site looking at a variety of burn effects and revegetation from the 2004 Boundary Fire. The JFSP was established in 1998 to provide scientific information and support for wildland fuel and fire management programs. The program is a partnership of six federal agencies; the USDA Forest Service; the Bureau of Indian Affairs; Bureau of Land Management; National Park Service; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. *Photo and text courtesy Randi Jandt & Jennifer Hrobak.*

AFS Employees Deploy To Support Hurricane Katrina Relief

Information Source

AFS & Team Information Officer John W. See

Many AFS employees from Alaska are providing support to the Hurricane Katrina relief effort.

Alaska Fire Service Plans, Training and Safety Chief Joe Ribar just returned to Fairbanks after serving as an Area Command Team commander in Baton Rouge, La., where his team coordinated the activities of the Incident Management Teams (IMT) in the region.

Also supporting the relief, the Alaska Type 1 Incident Management Team departed Alaska on Sept. 3 to assist the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with an unknown task following the devastation from Hurricane Katrina.

Team members were briefed after departure on a challenging task order issued by

FEMA to augment and coordinate the receiving and distribution (R&D) of travel trailers and mobile homes for evacuees at five sites throughout the southeast and eastern United States.

The team was based in Selma, Ala. with branch organizations of team members set up at the five outlying R&D sites. During the team's two week assignment over 9,700 trailers were received from contractors or redistributed to evacuees.

"We fulfilled our mission, enabling FEMA to fully staff the five operational staging areas that we were assigned and really increase the production," said Alaska Team Incident Commander Lynn Wilcock

The team received an additional task order on Sept. 21



Just a few of the 100,000 trailers the Alaska Type 1 Incident Management Team oversaw at receiving and distribution sites in five states. The trailers are being used as temporary housing for Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

to assist the State of Mississippi in augmenting their wildland firefighting capability.

"It's a dangerous situation," remarked Alaska Team Safety Officer Ken Bullman. "There are hundreds of tons of debris from recently fallen trees per acre that will fuel these fires."

Additional firefighting resources needed are being ordered by the Alaska Team, which will then pre-position resources based upon the daily fire danger assessment.

2005 Soldier Appreciation Day at Fort Wainwright



Onlookers visiting the Alaska Fire Service's display at the 2005 Fort Wainwright Soldier Appreciation Day held June 10. Photo: Maggie Rogers

AFS Fire Medic Program—Critical Support in the Field

By Jon Thomas

AFS Safety and Occupational Health Specialist

The Alaska Fire Service Fire Medic was very successful this year; setting a record for medic kits used in the field. Here are this year's stats:

Total Incidents Supported	17
Medic Personnel Fielded	26
Fire Medic Kits Fielded	11
Small Medic Kits Fielded	18
Miscellaneous Support Kits Fielded	84



One box of eight that make up the Full Fire Medic Kit. The Alaska Fire Service fielded 17 kits this fire season to qualified personnel under the Fire Medic Program. The kit contains emergency medical supplies and a wide-selection of over-the-counter medications. AFS Photo

Frontline Medical Support to Firefighters

By Charlyn Lacklen

AFS Safety and Occupational Health Specialist

Despite this year's fire season being the third largest in acres burned, only one severe injury was recorded. Thankfully, the injured smoke-jumper is already back on light duty and plans to be jumping again soon.

Right: A snapshot of reported injuries this year.



Left: Typical Field Aid Station setup. AFS Photo

Type of Injury	Number of Injuries
Knees	23
Back, Legs or Arms	18
Sickness	15
Head	14
Hands	14
Feet	11
Eyes	10
Other	6
Teeth	4
Burns	2
Smoke Inhalation	1

Chena Lakes Flood Control Project Prescribed Fire Update

*By Randi Jandt, Fire Ecologist & Jennifer Hrobak, Fuels Technician
AFS Fuels Section*

On May 20, the Remote Arm unit of the Chena Lakes Flood Control Project was ignited. The Alaska Fire Service conducts small prescribed burns for training purposes and to assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in vegetation management on the project. This was the fourth broadcast burn of the 200 acre unit and the third burn cycle since 2000 when monitoring plots were instituted.

The primary purpose of the prescribed burns are to maintain grassy vegetation throughout the floodplain and prevent further encroachment of large willows and trees. During a flood event, these larger shrubs and trees are tipped

over causing the roots to tear up the soil, damaging the silt layer and allowing water to drain out of the floodplain holding area.

Several fuel treatments were instituted throughout the unit, including hand-cutting trees and shrubs and crushing fuels with a dozer. Thus far, monitoring has shown that repeated burning achieves the project goals most effectively—through crushing, killing taller willows and increasing grasses, while promoting smaller willow regeneration to support moose and other wildlife inhabiting the floodplain.

Right and below. Various Photographs of the Denali Hotshots and Alaska Fire Service smokejumpers conducting the prescribed burn on the Remote Arm of the Chena Lakes Flood Control Project. AFS Photos



Public-Private Cooperation—Key To Success on Sheenjek River Fire

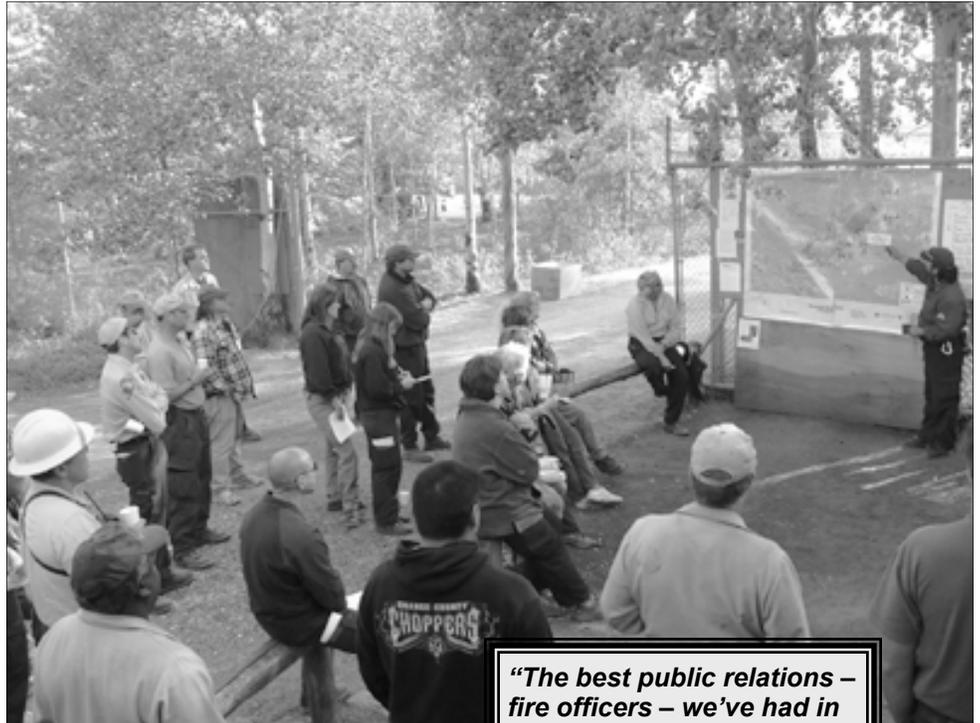
By Alecia McCoy
AFS Public Affairs Office

The Sheenjek River Fire, which began June 12, became one of the season's most costly fires and required a significant amount of resources. The fire also represented the positive relationship that can develop between fire suppression agencies and the residents of a community threatened by fire.

Due to the fire's proximity to Fort Yukon, the town was used as a resource staging area and incident command post. Members of the Incident Management Team (IMT) and other overhead worked closely with residents of the community to provide timely situation updates, and to ensure that the influx of fire personnel did not prove to be a drain on Fort Yukon's resources. At one point 283 personnel were assigned to the Sheenjek River Fire, nearly half the permanent population of Fort Yukon.

A large number of firefighters and overhead personnel converging on a small town will inevitably impact the community, and the IMT worked with residents to ensure that the working relationship between the fire community and Fort Yukon was advantageous to both parties. While occupying the town, the IMT hired many local residents, who offered up their assistance, as temporary employees and worked with the radio station to provide daily radio updates on the fire situation. Fire personnel were invited to participate in the town's Fourth of July celebration and Smokey Bear even made an appearance for the festivities.

Fire personnel also worked with members of the community to develop the town's first-ever evacuation plan; a plan which may con-



"The best public relations – fire officers – we've had in years. [The team] listened to recommendations, came to public meetings and invited us to the fire station."

**Davey James
Natural Resources Technician
Gwitchyaa Zhee Gwitchin
Native Village**



Photos by: A.J. Chapman

Above: Sheenjek Fire briefing

Left: Layne Clark and Eileen Wallace conducting finance activities.

tinue to be used in the future.

Davey James, a Natural Resources Technician with the Gwitchyaa Zhee Gwitchin native village of Fort Yukon, stated that they worked this summer with "the best public relations – fire officers – we've had in years. [The team] listened to recommendations, came to public meetings and invited us to the fire station."

Alaska Fire Service and other fire suppression personnel relied on the support of the Fort Yukon community during the Sheenjek River Fire and were privileged to be able to have such a positive work experience with local residents. Because of the high level of cooperation, fire suppression operations were able to run smoothly and objectives were able to be met.

More 2005 Fort Yukon / Sheenjek River Fire Photos

Photos: A.J. Chapman

Right: Tami DeFries with Fort Yukon youth.

Below middle: Pioneer Peak Type 1 crew in line.

Below bottom: Smokey Bear with child at Fort Yukon.



More Photos On Next Page...

More 2005 Fort Yukon / Sheenjek River Fire Photos

Photos: A.J. Chapman

Right: Pat O'Brien and Terri Berrie.

Below middle: Discussing operations along the river.

Below bottom: Cooks preparing a meal at Fort Yukon.



Infrared Aircraft Supports AFS Fire Suppression Effort

By Wes Stark

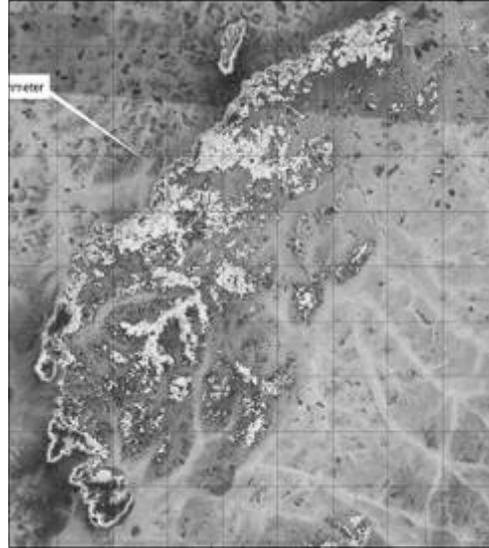
AFS Training Program Lead

Infrared technology (IR) helped AFS fire management officers this fire season in identifying fire perimeters even amidst the smoke that covered much of the state throughout the summer.

The Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC) ordered an IR-equipped aircraft through the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) to work in Alaska. Since NIFC has an agreement with Canada, the order was filled with an aircraft from the Range and Bearing Corporation of Pender Island, British Columbia. Range and Bearing has a contract with the Province of Alberta, therefore AICC could contract the aircraft as an affiliate, which meant only their crew could fly missions in the aircraft.

The IR aircraft, a PA-31-350 Navajo Chieftain, arrived on the morning of Aug. 4 with four people. The crew of two pilots and two engineers were able to clear immigration quickly, but the aircraft did not clear customs until Aug. 5.

Once cleared, they flew to Galena for a base of operations, but would return to Fairbanks approximately two or three times a week to resupply on oxygen and fly other nearby missions. Later, an additional pilot and engineer joined the crew so that they could have continuous coverage and give crewmembers days off.



Infrared products aided Alaska Fire Service personnel in identifying the perimeters of fires even though visibility was often obscured by smoke. AFS photo.

During the time they were in Alaska, the crew provided IR images of fires. Concentrating on the perimeters, they provided fire managers with much needed intelligence at a time when it was often too smoky to conduct reconnaissance flights.

Overall, the IR-equipped aircraft and crew logged 82+ flight hours while supporting 34 fires. They were released from Alaska on Aug. 24 and departed back to Canada.

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In Memory of...

Since the last *FIRELINE* issue, two highly respected members of the Alaska Fire Service team have passed away.

Andy Williams, AFS Public Affairs Officer, died last year, and Vernon Williams, AFS Electronics Mechanic died in August of this year.

Our thoughts go out to their families and friends.

AFS Team Evaluates Burn Severity From '04 Fires



Left. Burn severity evaluation team on a large mud flow clogging a stream from the Hodzana River Fire of 2004.

Standing left-to-right: Jen Hrobak, Randi Jandt, Merritt Turetsky, Eric Ellicott. AFS Photo

Right. Randi Jandt assesses burn severity on 2004 Dall City Fire. Photo: Jen Hrobak



Left. Large mud flow into stream channel due to permafrost melting on the Hodzana River Fire of 2004. Photo: Randi Jandt

Right. Evaluating erosion and mud flow from 2004 fires: soil scientists Merritt Turetsky and Eric Ellicott and fire/fuels technician Jen Hrobak. Photo: Randi Jandt



Professional Aviation— *BLM Alaska Style*

By Jim Truitt
BLM State Aviation Manager

The Alaska Fire Service has a tremendous resource in its Aviation Division that is comprised of a small group of highly experienced, trained, and qualified professionals. Daily they dedicate themselves to providing the most efficient, cost effective, and most importantly, the safest aviation support possible for the AFS and BLM Alaska.

Immediately following each fire season, the staff begins the planning for the next year. They capture the lessons learned—reviewing successes and issues that caused problems or reduced efficiency. This planning also includes training presentations to all BLM aviation users—including Basic Aviation Safety, Manager's Aviation Safety, Helicopter Manager Training, and various additional training activities to prepare crews or personnel for flight activities in the field.

The oversight and management required by AFS fire suppression efforts are similar to the mobilization of a military force being deployed to confront a threat. They plan and prepare for strategy and contract for aircraft services to deploy into forward positions and manage a quick response force comprised of Smokejumpers, Air Attack, and logistical support.

The use of helicopters is a critical component of our ability to respond in areas where there are no roads and little access for fixed-wing aircraft. The helicopter becomes the primary means of moving and recovering personnel.

Duties performed by BLM aircraft include reconnaissance, detection, surveillance, passenger movement, cargo supply, and basic transportation for staff needs. The tactical response aircraft perform their role whenever a fire is identified for response and the alarm sounds to launch aircraft and crews. The re-supply and support of ground fire efforts continues if the fire advances in size or poses threat to occupied areas.



Photos: Terry Anderson

In addition to fire suppression activities, the Aviation Division also provides continuous assistance to non-fire organizations throughout BLM. The use of aircraft occurs in every office of BLM Alaska to support the agency's large array of missions, programs and projects.

This indispensable service ensures the safe operation and confidence that has been established for employees to utilize aviation resources and trust that their well being is foremost in the minds of the Aviation Division. The additional responsibility is to maintain regulatory compliance while conducting all flight activities.

This compliance maintains our fiscal responsibility and the relationship we have with other agencies participating

in our mission or having a responsibility to review activities, as in the case of the Aviation Management Directorate.

The AFS Aviation Division is an example of a dynamic and dedicated workforce providing a service for a challenging and publicly scrutinized responsibility. The firefighting efforts are subject to many levels of operational and financial considerations. This contributes to an environment that requires individuals to actively utilize the traits that are accepted as the "right stuff" to get the job done. In this regard the Aviation Division has met the challenge and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

MORE 2005 BLM AVIATION PHOTOS



Right and above:
AFS smokejumpers prepare an aircraft for a para-cargo mission.
Photos: Maggie Rogers

Aviation Stats

Last year BLM Alaska Aviation conducted operations typical of a small airline company. Here are the stats:

Flight Time in Hours: 11,504

Passengers Flown: 27,324

Cargo: 5.8 million pounds

2005 aviation statistics are still being compiled but will be noted in the next issue of AFS FIRELINE.



Left & below.
Photos: A.J. Chapman



AFS Fire Support Cache—Vital To Mission Success

Information Courtesy
 Matt Cnudde, Chief
 AFS Branch of Supply

The AFS Fire Support Cache is part of the National Cache System consisting of nine USDA Forest Service and two Bureau of Land Management warehouses that supply the nation's wildland fire support needs as well as other incidents. This fire season the warehouse:

- Made 3,466 issues valued at \$12.69 million (\$25 million value including equipment and supplies returned);
- Shipped 1.83 million pounds of supplies and equipment;
- Shipped 1,653 fresh food boxes;
- Shipped 1,791 boxes of A and B food rations.



Photos: Kevin McIver



Photographs from the 2005 Alaska fire season.

Top: Employees checking cargo nets.

Middle: Campbell Bias, Issuing Warehouse Leader at the Issuing Desk.

Left: Gary Lee.

More AFS Fire Support Cache Photos From Fire Season 2005



Left: EFF Leah Curtiss working with equipment.

Photos: Kevin McIver



Above: Warehouse section conducting training. From the left, John Frisone, Bill Bishop, Campbell Bias, Lyell Chittenden, Gary Lee, Kenneth Camp, Joanne Waller, unidentified, and Rick O'Brien.



Left: Detailer Dale Ford, left, and EFF Alonzo Rivers rolling nets in the warehouse.

BLM Alaska Officials Visit Alaska Fire Service



Left: BLM Alaska Associate State Director Julia Dougan chats with Dalan Romero, Branch Chief of the Smokejumper Resources, during her visit to the Alaska Fire Service on Sept. 7. Photo: Kevin Mclver



Right: Alaska Fire Service Branch of Supply Chief Matt Cnudde, far right, gives BLM Alaska Deputy State Director of Geographic Sciences Gust Panos a tour of the warehouse. Panos visited the AFS on Sept. 13. Photo: Kevin Mclver



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