



MEDIA RELEASE

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DIVISION OF FORESTRY INFORMATION

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Human-caused wildland fires have consequences

The State of Alaska Division of Forestry will receive restitution funds from a settlement last Thursday, August 21, for the Parks Highway Fire that started in June 2006. In an attempt to recover some of the 2.9 million dollars in non-reimbursable suppression costs incurred by the State, the State filed a claim in July 2006 against the property owner responsible for the fire. The property owner then deposited with the Court the liability limits of his homeowners' policy and identified other parties who had claims arising from the fire. Even though the property owner had little beyond the insurance proceeds to satisfy any adverse judgment, the law provides that the State may recover double the amount of its suppression costs from a person responsible for starting a wildland fire.

Thursday's settlement resolved the litigation concerning the fire and awarded the State with \$90,000. Other parties that experienced damage, including Toghothlele Native Corporation and private property owners, also received settlements.

In Alaska, 85% of the fires that the Division of Forestry responds to are human-caused. They most often occur in populated areas and have the potential to create significant damage. Alaska's firefighting agencies campaign against the start of negligent fires each year in an effort to prevent situations like the Parks Highway Fire. Escaped wildland fires undergo investigation and, depending on the situation, there may be ramifications that take years to resolve. Litigation requires a lot of time, energy and money and the settlement is a reminder that carelessness with anything that can ignite a wildland fire is not worth the consequences.

The public is encouraged to take advantage of autumn weather to burn in barrels or to burn piles. However, it is important to use caution and practice safe burning, even after burn permits are no longer required. For more information about burn permits and fall debris burning, contact your local Division of Forestry office.

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