

## **Appendix P**

### **Alaska Fire Control Service to Alaska Fire Service**

The history of fire control within Interior Alaska dates back to 1939 when the Alaskan Fire Control Service was established under the General Land Office. Headquartered in Anchorage, it was given responsibility for fire suppression on an estimated 225 million fire-prone acres of public domain lands in Alaska. When the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was formed in 1946, it received the management authority for most of Alaska's federal lands and also absorbed the Alaska Fire Control Service. The BLM fire organization was based in Fairbanks and Anchorage and the two offices worked cooperatively but separately. The BLM also kept a Division of Fire Management at the State Office.

In 1959, the first of three big divestitures of land managed by BLM-Alaska began and, with the changes in land management authority, issues regarding wildland fire suppression responsibilities arose.

- Under the Statehood Act 1959, the State was granted 104 million acres of land.
- Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA) established Native corporations and an entitlement of 44 million acres for those corporations.
- The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA) transferred approximately 100 million acres from BLM administration to the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service.

To date, the conveyances to the State and Native corporations have not been completed and are on-going. BLM currently manages almost 86 million acres of land in Alaska. Once conveyances are completed, BLM will manage approximately 65 million acres of public lands in Alaska.

Under ANCSA, the federal government was directed to continue to provide wildland fire suppression on lands conveyed to Native regional and village corporation. In response to ANILCA, Secretarial Order #3077, dated March 17, 1982, creating "a fire line organization with headquarters in Fairbanks" was issued. BLM, Alaska Fire Service (AFS) was formed and, in Department of Interior Manual 620, AFS was assigned the fire suppression responsibility for all Department of Interior-administered lands in Alaska and Native Corporation land conveyed under ANCSA. Department of Interior-administered lands include land managed by the BLM, the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Each agency remained accountable for following its agency's mandates and policies for resource and wildland fire management. The role of AFS is to implement each agency's direction.

BLM Anchorage and Fairbanks districts fire suppression authority was delegated to AFS. The Division of Fire Management in the State Office was phased out. Today, in conjunction with his interagency role, the AFS Manager works directly for the BLM State Director and serves as the BLM State Fire Management Officer. The BLM Field Offices<sup>1</sup> retain the fire management responsibilities; AFS implements the fire direction given by the Field Offices and provides technical fire management expertise.

The State established a wildland fire suppression organization in the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, and, in the mid-1970s, began to gradually assume suppression responsibilities in the Anchorage area and on the Kenai Peninsula.

A reciprocal fire protection agreement was signed by the BLM, AFS and the State to cooperatively provide fire suppression operations in fire-prone areas. (AFS also has an agreement with the U.S. Army-Alaska for wildland fire suppression on BLM-managed lands withdrawn for military use.) Under the State agreement, AFS has the suppression responsibility for wildland fires in the northern half of the Alaska, regardless of

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<sup>1</sup> BLM Districts are now called Field Offices.

ownership. The State has the suppression responsibility for wildland fires in Southcentral, most of southwestern Alaska and portions of the central Interior. Most State protection areas are lands previously protected by the BLM Anchorage District; most of AFS protection is in areas once protected by the BLM Fairbanks District. As of 1985 when the State took over protection responsibilities for 66 million acres in southwest Alaska, the State and AFS each protect roughly half of the fire-prone lands in Alaska. The Forest Service protects State, federal, and Native lands within the boundaries of Chugach and Tongass National Forests.

Today AFS has an interagency multi-jurisdictional, landscape scale role in fire suppression that includes lands managed by all Department of Interior agencies, the State, Native corporations and the military.

The AFS budget is not dependent on the BLM fire management program, rather the role of AFS as created by the 1982 Secretarial Order 3077. That order recognized the economic and operational benefits of non-duplication of suppression services and statewide mobility of suppression forces. The AFS budget for fire management is approximately \$20 million annually. The bulk of this is \$13.5 million in wages for the personnel: 90 permanent full time, approximately 225 career seasonal and 90 temporary personnel in fire management and support. Approximately \$3,700,000 is for aircraft contracts. The budget does not include actual expenditures on fires as they are paid out of a different fund and are highly variable from year to year depending on the fire load.

There are currently 72 village Emergency Firefighter (EFF) crews that are supposed to be available for fire fighting in Alaska; 44 of those crews are sponsored by AFS; 28 are sponsored by the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry. The use of these crews is highly variable, depending on the number, timing, and locations of fires. Annual wages to crews within the AFS protection areas varied from less than \$600,000 to over \$13,000,000 during the decade from 1990 to 1999. These wages include monies earned for fighting fire within Alaska and the Lower 48.

With current management practices less than \$1,000,000 is spent annually for fuels treatment within Alaska and this is not expected to increase significantly under the proposed action. The proposed action includes up to 25 acres of fuels treatment annually in Critical areas and up to 20,000 acres of prescribed fire within Full areas. The mechanical or manual treatments may cost up to \$2000 per acre, for a net cost of \$50,000 annually. The prescribed fires may cost up to \$200 per acre, although they are planned at less than \$20 per acre.

Information on the socio-economic impacts of fire management beyond the summation of wages and budgets is scant. The University of Alaska Fairbanks and partners have begun a three-year project to attempt to quantify the human-fire interaction in Alaska. A portion of this work deals with the socio-economic impacts of fire in Alaska.