

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the day-to-day function of the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan (AIWFMP)?

The fire management plan sets priorities for the assignment of firefighting resources statewide.

How are priorities set for the assignment of firefighting resources?

Firefighter and public safety are the highest priority for all fire management activities. The Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan sets the initial attack priorities through the use of management option designations.

What is a fire management option?

Management options provide a range of alternatives from aggressive initial attack to surveillance. The AIWFMP contains 4 management option choices. Critical management option lands are the first priority for the assignment of suppression forces followed by Full, Modified and Limited in that order.

Who decides what management options apply to what lands?

Options are apportioned on a landscape scale across agency boundaries through a collaborative process by federal, State and Native land manager/owner(s) and suppression agencies.

Who represents private landowners?

The State of Alaska under State Statue 41.15.010

What are management option designations based on?

Option designations are based on an evaluation of legal mandates, policies, regulations, land use, resource management objectives, and local conditions.

How often are management options updated?

The AIWFMP stipulates an annual, pre-season land manager/owner review of the fire protection needs and management option designations. Changes are to be submitted to suppression agencies by April 1 of each year.

What determines Modified conversion date?

The Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (AWFCG) makes this determination based on an assessment of land managers inputs, weather trends, and the statewide fire occurrence. There are no predetermined dates for conversion; the customary date for conversion has been on or about July 10.

How are suppression decisions made?

Initial response decisions are determined by the management option designation defined under the AIWFMP. When a fire is beyond the capabilities of the initial forces, a Wildland Fire Situation Analysis is developed to evaluate alternatives and choose what the future actions will be.

How are suppression decisions implemented?

Delegations of Authority that set incident priorities, objectives and constraints are developed based on the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis and given to Incident Management Teams.

Who sets fire priorities during time of high fire activity?

Priorities are set by the Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (MAC). The function of this interagency group of land managers is to make decisions regarding the prioritizing of incidents and the sharing and use of critical fire fighting resources.

How do private landowners request full protection? How can private landowners ensure that their property is recorded on the suppression map atlas?

Private landowners should discuss the management option assigned to their property with their local State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry office.

How do you know what management options are assigned to state or federal permitted lands i.e. mining claims, recreation permits, etc.?

The stipulations in your permit should indicate the extent of protection offered. If not, check with the permitting office.

Will the assignment of Critical or Full Management Option to my site guarantee that my site will be protected from wildland fire?

The designation does not guarantee forces will be assigned to protect that site. The statewide fire occurrence and potential, availability of firefighting resources, access, defensible space requirements, and hazardous materials on the site are examples of factors that are considered.

Why do Native allotments receive full protection?

Native allotments are trust lands of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). BIA policy directs full protection.

Why do historical sites receive full protection?

Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act states "all Federal agencies shall assume responsibility for the preservation of historic properties which are owned or controlled by such agency."

What is the role of fire in the boreal forest ecosystem?

Fire is the primary agent of change in the boreal forest and is responsible for maintaining habitat heterogeneity in the large portion of mainland Alaska. For thousands of years, periodic fires have served to select plants and animals that are adapted to fire-caused change. Both the black and white spruce, for example, depend on severe ground fire to clear organic layers and to expose fertile seedbed. Black spruce, moreover, is at least partially dependent upon stand-replacement fire, in that its seeds become ready for germination at the peak of the Alaskan interior fire season and are released when its semi-serotinous cones are opened by canopy fire. Even more fundamentally, fire plays a key role in the regulation of the permafrost table throughout all the ecosystems of the Alaskan interior. Without fire, organic matter accumulates, the permafrost table rises, and ecosystem productivity declines. Vegetation communities become much less diverse and wildlife habitat decreases. Fire rejuvenates these systems. It removes insulating organic matter and elicits a warming of the soil. Nutrients are added both as a result of combustion and by increased decomposition rates.

What is the effect of fire exclusion from an ecosystem?

Excluding fire can result in the unnatural build up of vegetation which has resulted in catastrophic fires in the lower 48. It can also result in ecosystem productivity declining as the organic matter continues to increase.

What is the effect of fire exclusion in the boreal forest?

Excluding fire from the boreal forest, causes in an increase in old spruce dominated stands. Continuous expanses of fire-prone spruce forest can fuel large, intense fires which are difficult to contain, and expensive and dangerous to fight. This unnatural change in the forest cover also reduces forest productivity and diversity, which in turn adversely affects most wildlife species.

Will federal and state fire fighting budgets be increased as a result of intensity 2004 season?

No, budgets are static.

Will federal and state agency policies change as a result of the 2004 season?

Policies are under review; a few changes and/or clarifications have been recommended.

Why wasn't the military including the National Guard mobilized?

Fully qualified trained personnel from Alaska and the Lower 48 were available to fill request for personnel in 2004. National Guard personnel and equipment was used to transport firefighters; military personnel have not been trained to fight fires.

Why are Lower 48 personnel used in Alaska?

The extent of wildland fire activity exceeded the capabilities of trained and qualified personnel working in Alaska.

Why are the assignments only 14 days?

The national policy was written by the National Wildland Fire Coordinating Group and states the "standard assignment length is 14 days, exclusive of travel from and to the home unit". This policy was written to mitigate the fatigue that firefighters and fire managers accrued over the course of the fire season.

Why is the use of heavy equipment restricted?

Heavy equipment may permanently damage permafrost soils and tundra.

What can the homeowner's and permittee's to protect their homes and property?

Their responsibility is to implement Firewise concepts. An Alaska-specific Firewise brochure is available at <http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/forestry/pdfs/02firewise.pdf>.

Where can more information on homeowner and community actions be obtained?

Reference material is available on the internet. For example:

- Jack P. Cohen's article "A Site-Specific Approach for Assessing Fire Risk to Structures at the Wildland/Urban Interface" available at <http://www.firelab.org/fbp/fbpps/fbpps/cohen/sitespecificapproach.pdf>
- Reference the Firewise website for landscape recommendations at <http://www.firewise.org/>
- An example of a mitigation plan is Kenai Borough's All Hazard Mitigation Plan posted at <http://www.ci.kenai.ak.us/KenaiHazmitPlanFinalDraft.pdf>
- The National Fire Plan website <http://www.fireplan.gov/> discuss programs available to communities.
- An example for format and content for preparing a Community Wildland Fire Protection Plan <http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/cwpphandbook.pdf>

Why is timely and accurate information during the first 24-72 hours so difficult to obtain?

In spite of the information age we live in, obtaining information from the fireline during periods of intense, active fire behavior and extreme fire growth is not instantaneous. Fire fighters are busy dealing with on-the-ground life, property and safety concerns. As personnel fill public information positions, the flow of information improves. The effort to provide accurate information may also inhibit the effort to provide timely information.

What is the BAER Plan?

The 2004 Alaska Burned Area Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan addresses emergency stabilization and rehabilitation of fire suppression impacts and fire effects as a result of the 2004 fires in interior Alaska. The primary objectives are to determine mitigation measures necessary to protect human life, property, and critical cultural and natural resources, and

to mitigate the unacceptable effects of the fire and suppression impacts on lands within and adjacent to the burned area.

Where can I get a copy of the BAER Plan?

<http://www.ak.blm.gov/baer/index.html>

Is there data showing the effects of fire retardant?

U. S. Geological Survey has done research; the information is available at http://www.cerc.cr.usgs.gov/pubs/briefs/uv_fire_chemicals.pdf.

What are the health hazards associated with smoke from a wildland fire?

Suggested reading: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-42-volume 5, December 2002, *Wildland Fire in Ecosystems, Effects of Fire on Air* available at http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/main/fire_res/fire_pubs.html.

What is the role of the Predictive Service section of the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center?

The role is to integrate climate, weather, situation, resource status, and fuels information into products that will enhance the ability of managers to make sound decisions for both short and long range strategy development and resource allocation decisions.

Will salvage sales be offered?

The State has identified areas where timber salvage appear to be feasible and have proposed sales within the Billy Creek fire near Dot lake, two areas north of Tok near Wolf Lake, and one site along the Taylor Highway. Long term salvage rights will be marketed in spring 2005.

What should we expect to see next spring?

There may be small areas that smoldered through the winter in the riparian areas vegetated with white spruce. These areas contain deep duff and are sheltered from the harshest weather by the canopy cover. These hotspots are usually present little potential for fire danger. You may see the smoke.

What is the fire potential in the burned areas next year?

Environmental conditions plays a large role. Overall the fire danger potential is very low for 5 to 10 years after a fire.