



Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group Wildland Fire Education and Prevention Committee Interagency Wildland Fire Key Messages

Wildland fire management agencies and organizations in Alaska share common goals: to enhance personal safety and prevent loss of life while preserving and enhancing the health of forests and wetlands. For the public to truly understand the role of wildland fire, we must communicate clearly and consistently across all agencies and disciplines. To this end, the Wildland Fire Education and Prevention Committee (WFEPC), through the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (AWFCG), developed Wildland Fire Key Messages based on the following two key thematic points:

Role of Wildland Fire

Wildland fire is an essential, natural process that is important for the survival of many plants and animals in the boreal and tundra ecosystems of Alaska. Fires helped shape these ecosystems for thousands of years. Fire reduces accumulation of vegetation that can inhibit plant growth, stimulates new growth and reproduction in many plants, and provides diverse wildlife habitat. Fires behave differently throughout Alaska. Fire behavior is affected by weather, topography and vegetation. We continue to learn and now have a more complete understanding of the essential role fire plays in our environment.

Current Conditions

In most of Alaska, past suppression efforts have not altered the fire regimes. However, ongoing attempts to exclude fire near populated areas are changing forest characteristics, resulting in increased fuel continuity and reduced habitat diversity and productivity. There is a growing concern over the increasing fuel continuity near the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). These areas include forest and wetlands adjacent to villages, towns, cities, communities and may encompass individual cabin sites as well. When paired with the right topography and weather conditions, the expanse of spruce-dominated forest in these areas can lead to fires that burn hotter, spread faster and last longer. These fires are difficult to manage and pose a grave threat to residents and firefighters alike.

Public and firefighter safety is our first priority.

- Federal and state policies reflect the fact that human life, health, property and infrastructure concerns are placed above all others.

Wildland fire happens, be ready.

- People who live and recreate in fire-prone lands assume a certain level of risk and responsibility. Managing risk from wildland fire is a personal responsibility.
- People may live compatibly with wildland fire if they are aware of and prepared for local fire conditions.
- Individuals may utilize [Firewise principles](#) to reduce fire risk to their homes, property and communities.

Wildland fire is an essential, natural process.

- Fire has shaped many wildlands for thousands of years.
- In Alaska, wildfires are a natural part of the boreal forest and tundra landscapes.
- Alaska's boreal forests need fire to survive. These forests are fire-adapted ecosystems.
- Fires are necessary to maintain diversity in vegetation and wildlife habitat.
- Fire behaves differently throughout Alaska.
 - Virtually all vegetation types in Alaska can experience wildland fire but some, like black spruce, are especially prone to burning. Others, like hardwood stands, only burn well under extreme conditions.
- In populated areas, situations arise where the natural role of fire must be tempered with the need to protect human life, health, such as air quality, private property and infrastructures. Efforts are also made to protect natural and cultural resources from fire, as appropriate.

Alaskans work together to manage wildland fire.

- Every wildland fire season is different due to seasonal and annual variations.
- Fire does not acknowledge jurisdictional boundaries of federal, state, and local agencies, native organizations or private landowners.
- Wildland fire management in Alaska is a joint effort among federal, state, and local governments, native organizations, fire departments, communities and landowners.
- Agencies, native organizations and communities work together to understand and accept what it means to live in a fire-prone area and to realize the ecological benefits of wildland fire.

Managing wildland fire in Alaska balances risks and benefits in an ever-changing environment.

- Fire seasons in Alaska are starting earlier and trending longer. The consequences of a wildfire in a populated area with high values at risk are substantial.
- All fire management programs in Alaska adhere to the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan (AIWFMP).
 - The AIWFMP sets priorities for the assignment of firefighting resources statewide.

- The AIWFMP sets the initial attack priorities with management option designations. Management options provide a range of alternatives from aggressive initial attack to monitor status.
- The AIWFMP contains four management option choices. Critical management option lands are the first priority for the assignment of suppression forces followed by Full, Modified, and Limited.
- Fire management programs are customized for specific wildland areas to maintain healthy ecosystems and protect neighboring communities.
- Fire management programs are designed based on a balance of needs including fire suppression, prevention and using fire as a management tool to achieve resource objectives. These resource objectives may include prevention, suppression and allowing fire to play its natural ecological role.

Prevention is key to reducing human-caused wildfires

- Every wildland fire season is different due to seasonal and annual variations.
- Roughly 65 percent of statewide wildfires are human-caused.
- Carelessness and negligence leads to wildfires, at times close to populated areas, for example the Sockeye Fire in 2015.
- Keep informed on current wildland fire burning conditions, adhere to any burn restrictions that may be in place and have an evacuation plan ready (<https://www.ready.gov/>).
- Remember that wildland firefighters cannot do in 30 minutes what landowners failed to do in 30 years. Employ Firewise principles to make your home more resistant to wildland fires.

AWFCG WFEPc Members

Anchorage Fire Department

John See, seejw@ci.anchorage.ak.us

State of Alaska

Department of Environmental Conservation, Air Quality

Molly Birnbaum (Vice Chair), molly.irmbaum@alaska.gov

Paul Goodfellow (alternate), paul.goodfellow@alaska.gov

Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation

Sue Rodman (AWFCG Liaison), sue.rodman@alaska.gov

Mike Taras, mike.taras@alaska.gov

Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry

Tim Mowry, tim.mowry@alaska.gov

Dan Govoni (alternate), dan.govoni@alaska.gov

U.S. Department of Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Beth Ipsen, eipsen@blm.gov

Justin Ray, jray@blm.gov

National Park Service

Deborah Coble (Chair), deborah_coble@nps.gov

Tacy Skinner (alternate), tacy_skinner@nps.gov

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Dale Woitas, dale_woitas@fws.gov

USDA Forest Service

Carol Lagodich, ciladodich@fs.fed.us

Quintan Hecimovich (alternate), qhecimovich@fs.fed.us

For Additional Information about Wildland Fire

[Alaska Interagency Coordination Center](#)

[Alaska Fire Information](#)

[Alaska Fire Service Facebook](#)

[Division of Forestry Facebook](#)

[Anchorage Fire Department](#)

[State of Alaska – DEC, AQ](#)

[State of Alaska – ADF&G, DWC](#)

[State of Alaska – DNR, DOF](#)

[BLM Alaska Fire Service](#)

[National Park Service, Alaska](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)

[USDA Forest Service](#)

[National Fire Plan](#)
[Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management](#)