

# **McKINLEY FIRE**

## **INCIDENT SUMMARY**

**AUGUST 19TH-SEPTEMBER 2ND, 2019**



**Alaska Type 2 Green  
Incident Management Team**

**Norm McDonald  
Incident Commander**



# Fire Narrative

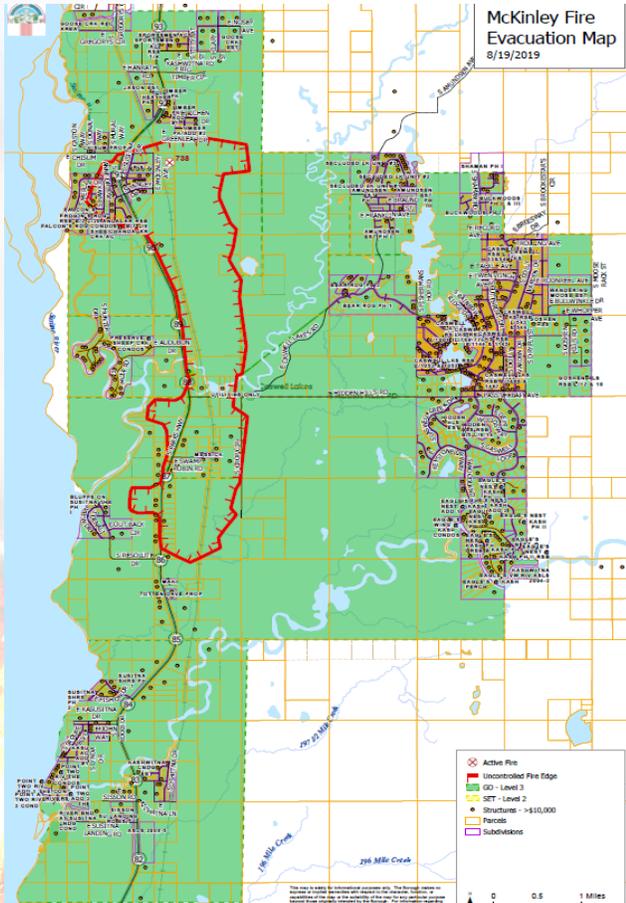
On August 17<sup>th</sup> 2019 the fire was reported by Helicopter 37PA at approximately 1620 while in route to another fire. The fire was initially reported at 2-3 acres in a Critical Management area and spreading rapidly due to the high north east winds with gusts to 24. Tanker 42, smokejumpers, multiple Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Divisions of Forestry (DOF) engines along with local fire departments responded. Structure protection was implemented and Tanker 42 dropped several loads of retardant to slow the fires progression. The fire was held in check at 150 acres with retardant. A type two Incident Management Team is ordered and Norm McDonald's Alaska Green Type 2 Team is assigned. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

On August 18<sup>th</sup>, the fire exhibited extreme fire behavior with high winds with gusts to 31 out of the north east contributing to a wind driven fire to the west. Rapid fire growth prompted evacuations and road closures. Fire personnel worked with the Alaska State Troopers and Volunteer Fire Departments to assist with evacuations and getting everyone out safely. Tanker 42 made several retardant drops at the head of the fire in an attempt to slow fire progression. The fire had significant impact to the subdivisions of Hidden Hills, Yancey, Swamp Robin, Audubon, Resolute, and Sustina Shores along the Parks Highway corridor between mileposts 84 and 91.

On August 19<sup>th</sup> at 1800 Alaska Type 2 Green Team, under the command of Incident Commander Norm McDonald took command of the fire from the DOF initial attack incident commander Greg Scully.

August 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> the fire diminished greatly with the north east wind subsided, however it remained active in the northeast and south portions of the fire. The interior of the fire around structures and infrastructure remained active. Some fire growth occurred on August 21<sup>st</sup>, perimeter growth has remained static since. Aerial and ground resources worked at containing interior spread to values while securing the perimeter simultaneously. This required more resources and time to accomplish. However, resistance to control was extreme due to the extreme drought resulting in very high to extreme fuel conditions. Active fire continued to spread on the southeast corner requiring more resources to contain it.

On August 23<sup>rd</sup> the evacuation levels were increased in the fire area in preparation for the forecasted increase in winds. There were 103 properties in Level 2 (set) and 59 in Level 1 (ready). The estimated 1028 properties remained in the Level 3 (go) evacuation status. Interior fire activity remained active, jackpot of fuels and trees



falling increased spotting potential posing threats to structures and infrastructure. Resources continued to secure the fire perimeter and respond to these hot spots in the interior of the fire. The IMT worked closely with the Matanuska Electric Association to restore power to the community with more than half of the power being restored. Alaska Fire Marshall reported that there were 52 primary structures, 3 non-residential commercial, and 84 secondary structures destroyed and 2 primary structures damaged with a majority of them being burned the evening of the 18th. Additional loss and damage to structures were minimal during the Teams tenure on the fire.

Jackpots of fuels continue to burn with very dry condition and the duff layer being burned completely, weakening the roots of the trees causing them to



“jackstraw” and flare up and torch nearby unburned trees. This took valuable time away from resources that were securing the fire perimeter, prolonging containment.

On August 26<sup>th</sup> at 1200, with recommendations from the Matanuska-Sustina Borough reduced the evacuation areas to Level 2 (set). The residents in Level 2 were lowered to Level 1 and lifted evacuation levels from areas that were in Level 1. The decision to allow residents to return to their homes was a difficult one. Although it increased risk of firefighters and the public, it allowed people to begin the difficult process of assessing their options and preparing for the winter, only a few weeks away.

The IMT worked closely with the Matanuska-Sustina Borough and Matanuska Electric Association with recovery efforts and to restore power to the communities. On August 27<sup>th</sup> two way traffic was opened on the Parks Highway with Alaska State Troopers working closely with the IMT to reduce the hazards to firefighters and utility workers working along the highway corridor. Perimeter control increased substantially and evacuation levels were reduced again on August 31<sup>st</sup> at 1200 with properties in Level 2 being reduced to Level 1 and properties in Level 1 lifted from evacuation levels.

**McKinley Fire**  
3,288 acres burned as of 09/02/2019

- ◆ Cause Under Investigation

**Protecting Agency/Unit:**

- ◆ Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry-Mat-Su/Southwest Area

**Jurisdictional Agencies/Units:**

- ◆ Alaska Department of Natural Resources
- ◆ BIA, Alaska State Office
- ◆ BLM, Glennallen Field Office
- ◆ Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated
- ◆ Caswell Native Association
- ◆ Montana Creek Native Association
- ◆ Alaska, Department of Transportation
- ◆ Alaska, Railroad
- ◆ Matanuska-Susitna Borough
- ◆ Private

The IMT worked together with the DNR, Matanuska-Sustina Borough, Cook Inlet Region Incorporated and private landowners to produce a Suppression Repair Plan. Multiple strategic planning sessions were conducted with Agency Administrators and DOF personnel.

July 24<sup>th</sup> was the last time the area saw a wetting rain. August is traditionally the wettest month of the year but has only received a trace amount of precipitation. The incoming low pressure system will produce some wetting rain, but drier weather and above average temperatures will return by the middle of next week.

The Susitna valley typically has not had an exceptionally high fire occurrence, but a significant loss of structures are associated with large fires that have occurred in the area in last 25 years. The 1994 Millers Reach fire started June 2, 1994 and eventually grew to approximately 37,000 acres and destroyed approximately 350 structures, the single largest loss of structure on any wildland fire in Alaska. The 2015 Sockeye fire started June 14, 2015 grew to approximately 7,000 acres and destroyed approximately 50 structures. The weather conditions experienced during Sockeye were similar to that on McKinley. The main difference between these two fires and McKinley is seasonality. Sockeye started during Alaska's duff driven part of fire season, while McKinley started during the drought driven part of the season.

The weather has been unusually dry in the Mat-Su Valley of Alaska the summer of 2019. Traditionally August is the month that receives the most precipitation with the average near five inches. The June, July, August timeframe is the driest on record since 1921. The last widespread rainfall was July 24 when ¾ of an inch fell across much of the valley. The McKinley fire started during a very strong and dry downslope wind event that occurred Saturday 8/17 and Sunday 8/18. The DOT weather site just north of the fire reported wind gusts from the north near 25 mph both days and minimum RHs below 25%. The RH recovery Saturday night was 44% and was above 40% for only four hours. A weak ridge of high pressure has been the dominate weather pattern since 8/18 with most days seeing high temperatures in the low 70s and minimum RHs near 30%. Winds during this time have been mostly terrain driven and less than 5 miles per hour with the exception of 8/25 which experienced north winds up to 10 mph and caused weakened trees in the fire area to fall.

McKinley Fire Ownership Fire Polygon 8/30/19		
Owner	Area (Acres)	Percent
ANCSA Reg/Village	429.6	13%
State	661.8	20%
Borough	902.0	27%
Private	1,294.8	39%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>3,288.2</b>	<b>100%</b>

# Incident Commander

## Key Decisions

**Expedited Roster:** Alaska Green IMT was asked by AWCg to roster a team, Tuesday August 20th after required days off from the previous assignment. The Incident Commander received a request to mobilize as a short team to the Swan Lake Fire on Saturday August 17th. After a brief discussion, the decision was made to roster immediately.

**Incident Prioritization:** Shortly after the request from the Swan Lake Fire, the Mat-Su Area responded to an emerging incident which was immediately threatening structures. The fire quickly grew to 150 acres. Because the Swan Fire was being managed by a Type 3 organization and the McKinley fire had immediate values threatened, the decision was made to assign the Alaska IMT to the McKinley incident.

**Managing the Dëshka Fire with a standalone IMT:** Initially the Alaska IMT was delegated both the McKinley and the Dëshka Fires. As the complexity of the McKinley fire became evident, the decision was made to assign the repositioned NW 10 team to the Dëshka fire. This decision was critical in mitigating span of control issues.



**Rapid transfer of command:** The Alaska IMT, in effort to relieve local resources, took operational control without a shadow period on Monday, August 20th. The common approach of a full shadow day was not an option due to fatigue of the initial attack resources.

**Highway control:** The Parks Highway was closed at the direction of the Initial Attack Incident Commander due to smoke and fire response personal safety. Alaskan highway closures create a massive downstream effect both politically, socially,

and economically. The Alaska IMT's objective was to get traffic control established and reopen at least one-way traffic as soon as it was safe. The Alaska IMT coordinated that direction with close coordination of the following agencies:

- Alaska State Troopers,
- Alaska National Guard,
- Department of Transportation with contracted flaggers.

**Opening highways to both lanes:** The Parks Highway was opened after one week of piloted one lane traffic. The reduced delays of up to 1 – 4 hours. The highway in the area of the fire from milepost 82 – 90 was tightly controlled by reducing speed limits to 45 mph and enforced by local law enforcement.

**Reducing Evacuation levels before containment:** Reentry of evacuated residents can often be a tenuous process. The Alaska IMT made the decision to allow reentry of residents after 8 days into the incident. This was before the fire was contained and during active operations within the fire perimeter. The intent was to allow those affected by the fire begin the recovery and assessment process needed to move forward and prepare for the upcoming winter months. Although this did cause a minor slow down in operations, it gained the trust of the community and showed our intent to bring some sense of normality to the community.

## Incident Objectives

For the majority of the McKinley Fire, incident objectives remained primarily the same. Operational command emphasis and general situational awareness bullets were used for daily tasking and direction, leaders intent and direction. Incident objectives included:

⇒ **Firefighter and public safety is our highest priority value to be protected**

- In the urban interface, hazards such as downed powerlines, burned hazardous waste, and burned falling trees are ever present. A field safety officer was assigned to each of the four divisions. Their focus was identifying where or what these hazards were and providing mitigations measures.

## Incident Objectives Cont.

- The most serious hazard was large and/or deep ash pits. This resulted in numerous, although minor burn injuries that were of serious concern. A pictorial advisory was issued, as were daily reminders. Still, any injury related to minor burns to the hands, feet, or legs were an issue and all units of the IMT worked to reduce this occurrence.
  - Given the burning of the duff layer associated with the drought conditions, falling trees were also a hazard. This too, was addressed in daily briefings and divisional breakouts and were mitigated with the use of heavy equipment such as feller-bunchers or excavators.
- ⇒ **Protect the communities and infrastructure along the Parks Highway corridor by containing fire edge and securing around structures within the perimeter. Coordinate operations with local and cooperating agencies.**
- The primary operational emphasis was a strategy of suppression both inside of the perimeter to ensure no additional structures were lost or damaged while checking areas on the perimeter that had the highest potential for growth. Crews and especially engines had to be mobile and reactive to Divisional instruction for changing priorities.
  - Local fire departments were incorporated into the operations throughout the incident.
  - Night crews responded to landowners reporting flare ups after repopulation back into their homes. These responses were most often to calm landowners rather than a need to suppress critical areas.
- ⇒ **The Parks Highway is a critical transportation corridor. Provide for safe and efficient traffic control along the Parks highway and the Alaska Railroad.**
- The railroad was the first transportation infrastructure to be returned to service. This was 72 hours into the incident and in cooperation with railroad personnel imbedded in the IMT. After the initial startup, the schedule returned with mitigations involving track clearance and notification of trains.
  - The railroad also secured a federal waiver to permit no whistles in area where crews were camping to facilitate sleeping.
  - Initial traffic delays were mitigated by the use of flaggers and pilot cars to enable one-way traffic flow. The Team worked with Alaska Department of Transportation (DOT) and Alaska State Troopers (AST) to lower the speed limits.
- ⇒ **Maintain and enhance relationships between the cooperating agencies and public.**
- A daily meeting was conducted that had 10 – 15 agencies, political entities, or local fire departments attending each day. This forum allowed cooperators to be briefed, interface with operational planning, and express concerns to the incident management team. Lessons learned from the Sockeye Fire in 2015 were useful in ensuring fire departments were involved, residents were given timely information, and recovery assistance was offered in a timely fashion.
- ⇒ **Provide timely and accurate information.**
- Both a low tech and high-tech information approach were used. The high-tech approach through social media and live streaming connected to the audience in order to keep residents and media sources informed on a timely basis. Low tech means involved reader boards and postings and highly visited areas. In addition, public meetings were held regularly in the communities of Willow and Talkeetna. These meetings were combined with Doshka Landing Fire to facilitate ease of information access for residents' interest in either fire.
- ⇒ **Facilitate re-entry of residents by mitigating hazards and securing infrastructure. Work with cooperating agencies and residents to begin the recovery process in conjunction with response and suppression efforts.**
- In keeping the Parks Highway open, even with one lane traffic, residents were able to repopulate the area despite evacuation orders not to return. Firefighters were then having to respond to “spotfires” where trees were falling into hot ash pits and burning out with noticeable vigor. This was distracting to planned operations, however, in the interest of public safety, engine crews dealt with this throughout the life of the incident. The IMT took an approach of co-existence, identifying and mitigating the issues as presented.
- ⇒ **Support initial attack as requested by the Mat-Su Area**
- The fire was located at the north extent of the Division of Forestry, Anchorage Mat-Su Area. The IMT assisted the area to ensure fires were detected early and could be suppressed when small during extreme fire conditions.
- ⇒ **Accurately track and ensure cost containment measures are identified, applied, and documented.**
- Finance provide a two-person Cost Unit. Daily projections were displayed and relayed to team members and Agency Administrators. This included a graphical display of expenditures. As is the often case, tracking aircraft costs, one of the largest expenditures, was often delayed, resulting in large “catch” up costs that added an element of inconsistency.

# Operations

## Key Decisions

- Order for the Team was made immediately. Decision to speed up the mobilization during team members' day-off allowed for expedited take-over.
- Decision to go direct and catch it as small as possible. This forced the Team to rely heavily on air support for the first three shifts.
- Adjusting suppression standards to 50' minimum to address firefighter safety.
- Formation of Utilities Group to integrate with Matanuska Energy Association. Allowed for quicker restoration of power and a coordinated operation.
- No PACE model. Minimized cost. Reduced operational workload.

## Notable Successes

- Injury rate low considering environmental conditions.
- Enhanced and maintained relationships with local cooperators and community.
- Held the fire to as relatively small footprint without the assistance of precipitation that is commonly seen in Alaska.
- Held fire during record-setting temperature, relative humidity's and Build up Indices.
- Quick mobilization of lower 48 crews.
- Continued to build capacity for the Alaska Team.
- Unified cooperation with Safety staff to address severe hazards.
- Formation of Utilities Group to coordinate and cooperate with Alaska Railroad, MEA, MTA and DOT.
- Proximity of ICP and Camp location to fire.
- Ability to hire a caterer simplified logistics and reduced the need for rotor wing support necessary to support remote camps.
- Specialized equipment orders filled timely and locally.



# Operations Cont.

## Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Inability to take a standard anchor, flank and pinch approach due to lack of resources and structures within the perimeter. This forced Operations to spread forces thin and focus only on the immediate threat areas. Relied heavily on air support for perimeter control until crews and/or equipment became available. As resources arrived perimeter containment was pieced together.
- Operations was supported well with our orders. Able to have 10 Lower 48 crews mobilized quickly while sharing resources with other fires in the region.
- Cooperators were utilized continuously from start of fire until now. Uncertainty about their ability to support us left us a little vulnerable; however, without their contribution the team may not have been able to hold the fire and prevent further loss. This required daily communication to ensure continuity of resources.
- Significant hazards required daily attention. Close cooperation between Safety and Operations ensured a more acceptable level of risk. Ash pits, hazard trees, areas of blowdown and unusually dry fuels all required mitigations. Numerous ash pit caused injuries continued throughout the first 12 days and were never completely mitigated despite a heavy messaging campaign and use of infra-red cameras to identify hot ash pits. This remains an unresolved challenge.
- Parks Highway re-opening was a success for the community but a challenge for firefighters. Alaska State Troopers were extremely helpful during the one-lane traffic restrictions in the first eight days. Once the highway was opened to two-way traffic, an increase in traffic and speeders with a reduction in patrol units caused additional risk. Improved signage, cones and flaggers allowed for an acceptable level of risk to continue our work.
- Supporting the Matanuska Electric Association in their effort to re-establish power to over 500 users was both a success and challenge. Power to all meters was accomplished on day 12 of the incident. However, the rapid pace caused many flare-ups as trees were downed over hotspots and caused numerous significant flare-ups. This slowed the progress of firefighters but decreased to time needed to return power.

## Trainees

- Operations section was able to utilize many trainees into the organization. Besides traditional operational trainees we were able to provide trainees in Safety, Finance and Aviation roles.

## Water Usage

- Daily averages for water usage from Sheep Creek fill-site: 182,000 gallons; Kashwitna fill-site 72,000 gallons.
- Total to date: approximately 2,730,000 gallons from Sheep Creek fill-site; 578,856 gallons from Kashwitna fill-site; 510,030 gallons at heli-base.

Trainees	Number
OPS2	1
DIVS	5
TFLD	4
CRWB	11
FFT1	22
FFT2	1
FELB	4
FAL3	1
FAL2	1
HECM	3
TIME	1
SOFR	2



# Air Operations

## Significant Events

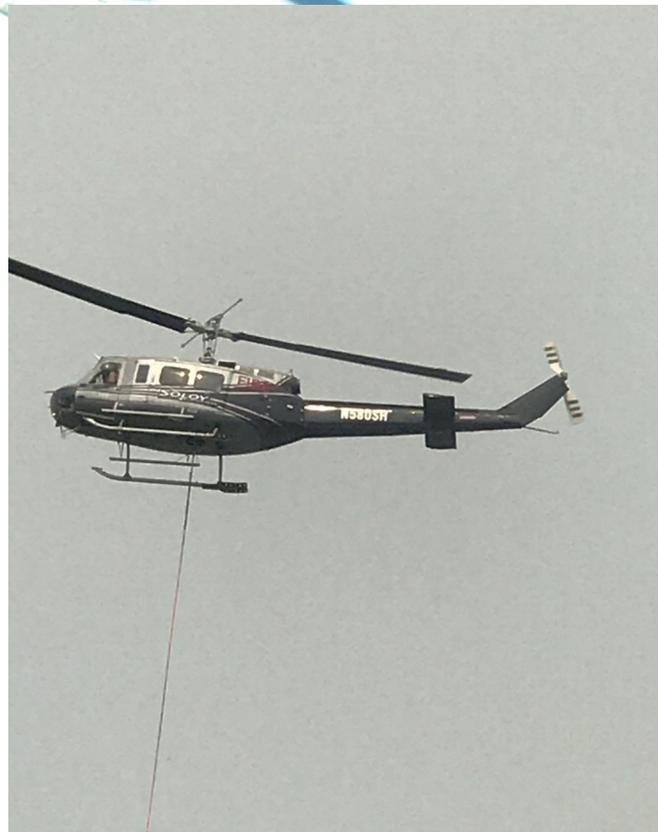
- From 8/18 through 8/30, 82,873 gallons of retardant and 589,105 gallons of water were dropped on the fire.
- The helibase and the incident Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) were based at the Talkeetna Airport (TKA). Talkeetna was chosen due to the ability of the helibase and ATGS to be co-located and the logistical support services available. The airport manager, Pete McCullough, provided expertise and assistance that greatly enhanced incident air operations and safety.
- Two air-to-air frequencies and two air-to-ground frequencies are assigned to the incident.

## Safety Concerns

- Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) incursions were a problem early in the incident but have been mitigated with TFR modifications (see below).
- Power lines adjacent to the Parks Highway and near residences are a concern.
- Bucket ships crossed the highway at times due to the concentration of water sources on the East side of the fire.
- Rotor wash is a concern due to the large number of trees falling in the fire area.

## Notable Successes

- UAS were used extensively for infrared (IR) capability and reconnaissance. UAS reduced firefighter exposure by identifying hazards and pinpointing areas of concern.
- Costs were minimized by using National Guard and Exclusive Use resources when possible.
- Air operations personnel built a strong relationship with the Talkeetna Airport Manager, which the local unit can continue to develop during future incidents.
- The Incident Management Teams on the Deshka Landing, Swan Lake, and McKinley Fires communicated well and shared aviation resources efficiently.



- The DOF Mat-Su Dispatch Aircraft Desk provided invaluable support for ordering resources.
- Fixed wing support (air tankers and ATGS) from Palmer was timely and effective in slowing fire spread.

# Air Operations Cont.

## Challenge:

- Multiple TFR incursions per day and multiple requests from public and private entities to fly UAS in the TFR area.

## Resolution:

- The TFR was modified twice. The first modification made the TFR area smaller and extended the active TFR hours to 0800 to 2300 local time. This modification accommodated the incident UAS pilots' request to conduct IR flights earlier in the day. It also allowed general aviation traffic using the Parks Highway as a navigational reference an easier path around the TFR. The second modification returned the active hours to 1000 to 2300. This allowed private entities to complete UAS operations in the morning before the TFR became active.

## Trainees:

Susan Bissell – Air Support Group Supervisor (ASGS)

Britta West – Deck Coordinator (DECK)

### Helicopter Operations

- Type 1: 2
- Type 2: 3
- Type 3: 1
- Passengers Delivered: 70
- Cargo delivered: 23,751 lbs

### Air Attack

- Number of Platforms: 2

### Fixed-wing Logistics

- Number of Platforms: 5

### Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)

- Number of Platforms: 2



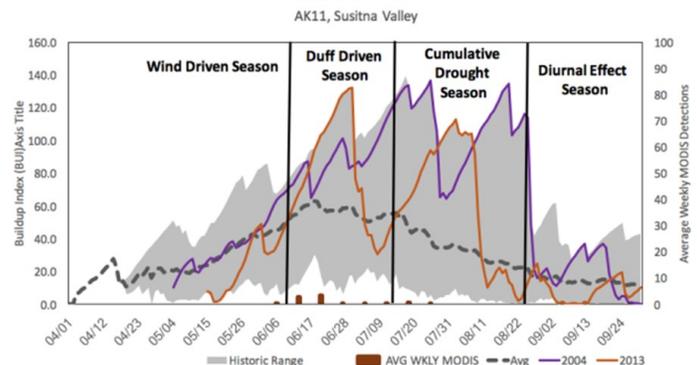
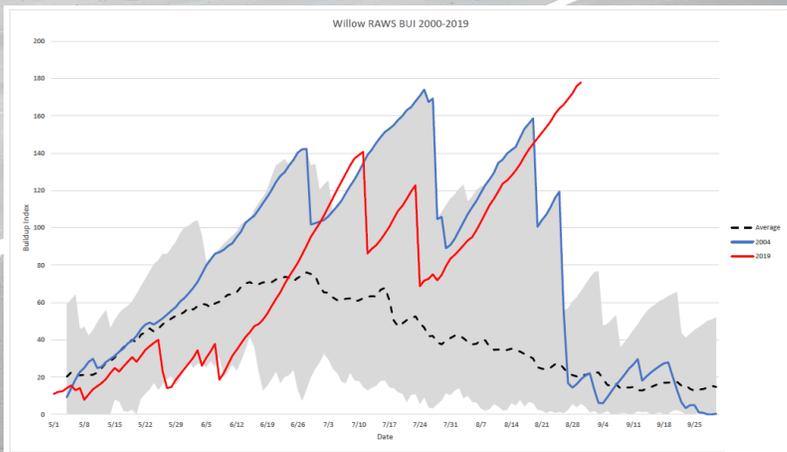
# Fire Weather & Behavior



- The Fire Behavior Analyst, working with Alaska Inter-agency Coordination Center Predictive Services, provided initial long term analysis.
- An Incident Meteorologist (IMET) was ordered with the team and was filled with the local Anchorage forecast office personnel filled this role. The IMET was familiar with the local situation and completed spot weather forecasts for McKinley and Deshka Landing for their staff. IMET coverage throughout the incident provided crucial information about conditions on the fire.
- A two-day wind event coupled with extended drought allowed the fire to rapidly spread south along the Parks Highway. Fire season in South Central Alaska normally occurs in late June and July. Climatology does not highlight significant

fire potential in the area in late August.

- Buildup Index values exceeded highest values ever recorded at the Willow Remote Weather Station on 8/29, well outside of regular fire occurrence in South Central.
- All fuels types were available to burn including hardwoods.
- A spruce bark beetle epidemic has left a 95% mortality rate in white spruce. Amber leaf miner has affected birch trees, killing the leaves but not the trees making them more flammable. Conditions this dry allowed fire to easily be carried through large hardwood stands with reports of hardwoods torching.
- The implications of the extremely dry duff layer was immediately apparent after the initial fire spread.
- The entire duff layer was consumed by fire leaving green and fire weakened trees unstable and falling over with little or no wind. Trees began fall creating large jackpots of fuel on hot duff causing single and group tree torching around these jackpots. Falling trees also impacted the power lines, roads, railroad tracks and private property. Mop up is a long ongoing process requiring a lot of water and time from personnel to extinguish.



# Fire Weather & Behavior Cont.

- I don't know where that west wind is coming from.
- When is it gonna rain?
- Precipitation at 0100, nailed it!



- The Plans section and the team would increase its capacity if it would carry a Long Term Fire Analyst (LTAN) or Strategic Operational Planner (SOPL) as a regular position. More incidents are requiring long term analysis and decision support. These gaps are currently being filled by current team members. As this requirement becomes a team expectation, incorporating an additional position into the Plans section will be valuable. The direct suppression strategy of this fire did not require the additional plans personnel but should be a consideration for future assignments.

## Mckinley Fire General Weather Outlook

For Planning Purposes Only, see IAP Forecasts for the Official Forecast

Forecast made Tuesday, August 27, 2019 - Mark Loeffelbein IMET & Chris Moore FBAN

	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU
	16-Aug	17-Aug	18-Aug	19-Aug	20-Aug	21-Aug	22-Aug
Clouds @ 1500 (%)	0	0	0	0	0	70	0
Max Temp (F)	78	71	67	63	64	66	68
20ft Wind (mph)	12	17	16	5	7	5	8
Wind Direction*	SW	NE	NE	SW	SW	SW	N
Min Humidity (%)	32	25	22	27	32	30	24
RH Recoveries (%)	86	60	44	89	89	93	86
Fire Behavior Potential	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme	Active	Active	Active	Active

### KEY:

	Conditions Favoring Low to Moderate Fire Behavior	Conditions Favoring High Fire Behavior	Conditions Favoring Extreme Fire Behavior
Clouds	>= 40 %	20 to 39 %	< 20 %
Avg Max Temp	<= 64 F	65 to 74 F	>= 75 F
Wind Speed	<= 7 mph	8 to 14 mph	>=15 mph
*Wind Direction	Criticality of wind direction highly dependent on burn operations and/or structures threatened		
Min Humidity	>= 40 %	31 to 39 %	<= 30 %
Humidity Recoveries	>= 70 %	50 to 69 %	< 50 %

# Liaison Officer

## Key Decisions

- Filling the Liaison position. This allowed many tasks and duties to be accomplished by the Liaison Officer. This unburdens the IC, Deputy IC, Information Officer, and others members of the Command and General Staff, who can then put their efforts into leadership, strategic planning and management of the incident.
- Implementing the level 3 evacuation during initial attack likely saved lives.
- Reducing the evacuation levels from a 3 to 2, and a 2 to 1 as soon as practical on 8/26. This allowed public to return home and get started with recovery before winter sets in.
- Initiating the Cooperators Meeting at the earliest opportunity. This developed camaraderie with cooperators, shared information, solved issues, improved efficiency, fire fighter and public safety. It also allowed the team and cooperators to become proactive instead of reactive with many pertinent issues.

## Notable Successes

- There were many personal contacts, emails and phone calls and messages to reach out to Local Fire Chiefs, Mayor, local government officials, Borough Department of Emergency Service Managers, Red Cross, Alaska Railroad, Alaska State Troopers, Department of Homeland Security for the State of Alaska, Community Emergency Response Team, Community Organization Active in Disasters (COAD), Matanuska Electric Association, local politicians, and local citizens. This has improved relationships, improved efficiency on the fire and helps enhance fire fighter and public safety.
- Issues that were brought forward included, need for fire information, Parks Highway road reduced to one lane, evacuation orders, burning closures, and access to areas affected by the Level 3 Evacuation, disposal of spoiled food, slash, metal and hazardous materials, various, property assessments, drone use, humanitarian relief, assessment of damaged property, rumors, and proper signing of traffic issues on the Parks Highway, safety of school bus pickup sites. Issues were resolved during the team's tenure.
- John Newson Team Rubicon. The Mat-Su Borough Office of Emergency Management, Manager Casey Cook invited Team Rubicon to assist citizens to remove debris from the fire. Team Rubicon will fall under the Mat-Su command. Team Rubicon has made an arrangement with Operations to communicate with the divisions when entering areas. Team Rubicon has also linked in with Safety Officers to get briefed on hazards out there.



# Liaison Officer Cont.

## Opportunities to Enhance Efficiencies

- Utilizing local borough, CERT Team, Willow Area Community Organization the Community Organizations Active in Disaster Group liaisons to meet preseason with local emergency responders and public service organizations and Incident Management Team representatives. This will be helpful in improving efficiency for future incidents. It would also help local cooperators, external partners, and grass root groups understand Incident management policy, process and become part of the solution.
- A dynamic list of important cooperators to be given to IMT's at inbrief. This would certainly improve IMT Liaison efforts on an incident.
- Order Liaison with initial IMT mobilization.
- See Documentation Package for list of Cooperators and Issues Log, rosters from Cooperator Meetings, Notes from Cooperators meetings.



## Information Statistics

**Info Boards:** 11  
**Daily Trapline Mileage:** 70 miles  
**Number of stops:** 20  
**Face to Face contacts:** 1,500+  
**Community Meetings Hosted:** 11  
**Social Media Peak Reach:**

- Facebook 66,000
- AKFireInfo.com 1,500
- Video/YouTube 11,400

## Information

- Daily live updates were recorded at least 3 times from various locations regarding the fire on Facebook. These updates were cross posted to various Facebook pages: DOF, BLM, AK IMT, Mat-Su Borough, Mat-Su Emergency Management, and Mat-Su Emergency Services. The videos were also uploaded to the designated McKinley Fire YouTube page. Many of these updates were utilized in different news reports with KTUU and KTVA.
- In the three days following initial attack on the McKinley Fire, page likes on the Alaska DOF page jumped by 2500 people. Since August 17, total page likes have increased from 35,000 to approx. 38,600.
- Peak reach on August 19 (a day after IA) was 96,600, on August 21, we reached 79,200. August 25 reach was 108,700 and August 27 was 106K.
- Page views between August 18-19 peaked at 13K
- Of the 64 videos shared from the McKinley fire so far, peak video views (approx 66K) took place on August 19-20.
- Total views on YouTube since August 19 are approx 11.4K, with 250 subscribers.
- Daily updates were distributed through the McKinley Firenet account and posted to AKFireInfo.com, which in turn automatically posts to BLM Alaska Fire Service and Alaska Division of Forestry Facebook pages and their corresponding Twitter feeds. These posts were boosted to the AK IMT Facebook and Twitter feeds.
- There was a designated phone number assigned to the McKinley Fire that was monitored from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.



# Information Cont.

- The PIO Team has several professional wildland trained videographers/photographers who were able to film out on the fire line and create brief videos to educate the public.
- Developed a working relationship and ability to utilize American Sign Language interrupter provided to be an asset allowing our team to communicate with the deaf community members.



**From August 19-31, 2019 the Alaska IMT hosted eleven community meetings:**

- Monday, August 19, Upper Susitna Senior Center 1800 (PIO light)
- Tuesday, August 20, Willow Elementary, 1800
- Wednesday, August 21, Upper Susitna Senior Center 1430 (IC/PIO - light)
- Wednesday, August 21, Menard Center, 1800 (IC/PIO - light)
- Doshka Landing Fire\* Thursday, August 22, Willow Elementary
- Friday, August 23, Willow Elementary, 1800
- Sunday, August 25, Upper Susitna Senior Center 1030
- Doshka Landing Fire\* Sunday, August 25 Willow Elementary, 1730
- Tuesday, August 27, Willow Elementary, 1830
- Wednesday, August 28, Upper Susitna Senior Center, 1830
- Sunday, September 1, Willow Elementary, 1800



# Safety

## Key Decisions and Successes

- Placing qualified Line Safety Officers (SOFR) in each Division due to the complexity of the hazards.
- Utilizing two SOFR trainees provided flexibility to cover additional needs.
- Reducing vehicle traffic on the Parks Highway from two way to one way during low visibility and firefighting activity, requesting traffic control assistance and presence from Alaska State Troopers and pilot cars with flaggers from Quality Asphalt and Paving was essential in providing firefighter safety and public safety.
- A double fines corridor with reduced speed to 45 MPH from 65 MPH, no passing zones and significant signage including large digital display signs and tall highway candlestick cones to control passing ability through the section of highway where firefighters were operating greatly enhanced firefighter safety.
- Establishing a “Double Fines” highway corridor with reduced speed and no passing zone was also a key decision.
- The decision to provide amber caution lights for operations and safety vehicles to enhance their visibility along the Parks Highway and help the public distinguish fire personnel from potential looters.



## Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- The hazard of hot ash pits was a significant safety concern due to difficulty in seeing them and determining the size of individual pits. These pits often appeared small on the surface but were much larger underground. Firefighters would approach what appeared to be a small pit some distance away and then fall into it before reaching the point they determined it to be in on the surface. This resulted in first and second degree burns to the feet, legs and hands as they fell into the hot ash.
- This was mitigate by directing personnel to proceed with caution, using a handheld IR and probe the area ahead of themselves with tool handle or pole.



# Medical

## Key Decisions:

- The decision to mobilize a second MEDL was critical to the success of the Medical Unit. With two MEDLs, we were able to divide the responsibilities of the unit so that we could cover both the operational responsibilities and the staffing requirements.
- The decision to hire Delta Medical Ambulance was invaluable. Having a dedicated ambulance on the incident that was ready to transport gave us the ability to leave medics in place on the line where they were needed most.



## Notable successes:

- The positive working relation that was developed with Communications was critical for managing medical incidents on the fire line. Through Communications we were able to track the location of Medics and Ambulances in order to make the best decisions for patients regarding definitive care.
- The ability to have an AAR after a yellow medical allowed us to have an open dialog with safety and operations in order to implement new procedures and establish a consistent plan for calling in green, yellow and red incidents.

## Significant Events:

### Injuries:

There were eleven (11) reportable injuries  
nine (9) burns and two (2) medicals.

### Trends:

Burns, Cough/Cold and Blister care.

### Unit Patient Contacts:

Patient contacts as of 8/29:

198 total patient contacts



# Logistics

## Key Decisions

- The LaDaSa base camp was ideal in location and amenities for the fire personnel. Camping, day sleeping, showers, dining facilities, potable water and ample parking opportunities allowed facilities to minimize the need for multiple outside vendors and contractors. The ability of the camp staff to feed the fire personnel during the initial attack phase was extremely beneficial to the firefighters during the first few days.
- The Willow Community Centers made for an excellent Incident Command Post (ICP) for the size of this incident. The local staff were more than accommodating to our needs. The school's copy machines and internet access on site aided in getting the team operational quickly. Adjacent camping and adequate parking were a bonus.
- Improvisation was the name of the game, as early assembly of all of the units was accomplished with limited resources, personnel and outside contributions. Out of the box thinking was crucial to the success of the unit.
- Three logistics trainees successfully completed their taskbooks during the fire.
- Hot Shot catering was a welcome addition to the team. They were able to quickly mobilize, set up and be ready to feed up to 600 personnel during the first 72 hours of operations.



## Communications Unit

### Notable Successes

- Cooperating with local State techs to get initial command repeater installed.
- Creating backup plan to replace the State command repeater should the situation arise.
- Integrating Initial Attack (IA) into communications plan for interoperability.
- The Communications Unit Leader and Incident Communications Technician arrived with the incoming Type 2 Team, attended the agency in-briefing and established the Communications Center at the ICP on August 19.
- Installed Air link for helibase operations for better coverages down in the valleys.
- Established a camp net for resources to communicate between base camp and ICP.
- Placed radio operators to cover day and night shifts to accommodate night operations. Ordered Starter 4390 NFES system with second repeater 4312 NFES during initial startup of the fire to ensure communications met the needs of the team and operations.
- Developed transition plan for incoming team.



## Supply Unit

### Notable Successes

- Supply unit ordered NFES and local supplies direct to the Palmer Supply Facility provided for quick and efficient delivery of supplies. The school hockey area provided a secure area to keep supplies without having to order additional security personnel.
- Warehouse trucks were loaded at the staging area and backhaul of line equipment went direct to the warehouse. This saved personnel from having to handle backhaul line equipment multiple times.
- The DOF Mat-Su Area provided a supply crew that was initially their IA squad. These personnel were a great asset to supply as they already had a good understanding of ICS, fire supplies and the local area.

### Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- There were not any significant challenges the Palmer warehouse was only two hours away and provided quick and efficient delivery of all supplies.

# Logistics Cont.

## Facilities Unit

### Notable Successes

- ICP was established at Willow Community Center. The Community Center provided adequate office space and parking for a type 2 operation. Most of the team's sections were in one large multipurpose room that had good acoustics which worked out well. The Community Center was an excellent location for ICP because of the proximity to the Base Camp which was established 2 mile south at Camp LaDaSa. The Base Camp at LaDaSa also worked out very well, we were able to sleep (some in cabins), shower and feed over 500 firefighters. Camp LaDaSa also provided potable water which eliminated the need to rent a potable water truck. Camp LaDaSa also provided hot meals and lunches for the firefighters for 3 days before the caterer arrived. The ICP and Camp were kept clean by 2 camp crews from the Tok area which made the whole operation a nice place to work and live.

### Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Parking at Base Camp was very cramped but using BCMG's to direct parking and opening up the lower church lot made it work. Agreements and invoices were slow to arrive, we kept asking for information.

## Food Unit

### Notable Successes

- During the early days of the fire, we had over 200 personnel including fire, overhead, law enforcement and volunteer/cooperators. The staff at Camp LaDaSa were able to prepare ad hoc food for the first 48 hours while a caterer was located. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were prepared until the caterer prepared dinner on the third day.
- The base camp was an excellent location for serving the firefighters, providing the caterer with a very workable and clean environment to serve food. The camp was gracious enough to allow the caterer to use their dining areas for the firefighters.
- The Hot Shot team quickly responded to provide food to over 600 personnel. The staff was flexible with the fire's needs and the team was a pleasure to work with

## Ground Support Unit

### Notable Successes

- The ground support functioned very well with a fully staffed organization.
- Ordered one fully qualified equipment manager and one trainee to capture and inspect incoming equipment.
- One dedicated EQPM to checkout rentals and keep track of equipment inventory and one for general transportation requests.
- The credit cards provided by the area failed on three or four occasions at the gas stations providing fuel for vehicles and equipment. Ground support received calls from incoming overhead and on one occasion Coastal Dispatch for immediate airport pickup. There was no prior knowledge of airport transportation needed to the fire. Two busses suffered mechanical problems and were resolved with minimal impact to the incident.
- McKinley fire ground support experienced a good working relationship with Fairbanks, Palmer and Soldotna Ground Support in mobilizing and demobilizing incident rentals.

### Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- There were four area dispatches ordering or involved in the fire that caused confusion and duplications of effort. The blue equipment rental envelope directions and objectives are not working. There were conflicting directions on how the envelopes were to be processed, affecting finance and the cost unit. Without clear directions for all involved - ground support, finance and the operator - it was difficult determine what ground support responsibility was.



# Planning

- The requesting unit placed an order for a short IMT. Upon activation, as the fire spread closer to structures and evacuations were initiated, the IC and Agency Administrator verbally agreed on expanding the original short order to accommodate a larger more appropriately sized organization. This led to some consternation between the Team and Alaska Inter-agency Coordination Center (AICC), who did not expect or have a clear understanding of why the team roster was expanding after time of dispatch.
- Following standard protocol, AICC “shut down” the Team roster at the time of in-brief. This means the team could no longer add additional positions to the roster via AICC, and had to order through the local unit instead. This was challenging because the local dispatch center was dealing with evacuations and Borough “all calls” for cooperators assistance on the McKinley Fire, a similarly complex situation on the emerging Dëshka Fire, and responding to 14 other fire reports that evening, most threatening values. If the decision to “close the roster” by the coordination center was a shared decision, preceded by a conversation with the team, AICC could have helped both the team and requesting unit by keeping that workload off of the local dispatch center at a critical time.
- Due to an FMAG declaration, the Alaska Team included a Documentation Unit Leader. This position was key in tracking both electronic and paper documentation. They also assisted the Finance Section in file management.
- Coordination with cooperators was important to the success of the team. Good communication through cooperator attendance of both daily meetings and briefings contributed to a unified response effort. Cooperators included the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Department of Emergency Services, Fire Departments throughout the Borough, Alaska State Troopers, Department of Transportation, Alaska Railroad, and Alaska National Guard.
- There were two Strategic Planning Meetings hosted by the Alaska Team. These included cooperators and contributed to a common operating picture for all response personnel.
- Morning Operational Briefings were held at LadaSa Basecamp, located a few miles from camp. The briefing area was superb – a natural amphitheater provided good viewing and good sound.

<u>Planning Statistics</u>	
Published WFDSS Decisions:	1
Documentation Boxes:	6
Daily IAPs :	300
<u>Resources at Peak</u>	
Crews	14
Camp Crews	2
Engines	28
Helicopters	7
Dozer	1
Water Tenders	22
Masticator	1
Max Number of Personnel	571

- Afternoon Tactics (pre-planning) Meetings were done “over the hood” in the field. The Resource Unit Leader and Planning Operations drove to the Sheep Creek Staging Area to meet with Field Operations and Division Supervisors. This strategy contributed to very accurate and timely IAP ICS-204’s. Operational personnel commented on how efficient this process was, and recommended it as a “best practice” in the future.

<u>Key Decisions</u>
Using Arc Pro instead of Arc Map
Swing shift
Establishing a cut off time and procedures for field updates
Using Dedicated AT&T Nighthawk Router for GIS



- Coordination with the NICC jetloads of crews were a challenge. Not knowing how many the incident was receiving and coordinating demobilization of split loads was challenging.
- After much anguish and many late nights, GIS got became more proficient in ArcPro to produce fire maps.
- Successfully used of Collector and Survey123 in the Structure group and with the READ.

# Finance

- Financial operations were in compliance with direction from agency representatives.
- The McKinley Fire was an FMAG Fire from the beginning of our tenure.
- Finance Section was adequately staffed to allow timely posting of Crew Time Reports and Shift tickets within E-Isuite system.
- Costs were updated daily and kept current.
- Approximately \$400,000 in cost savings were due to
  - ◆ Ordering transport from point to point
  - ◆ Ordering a caterer versus fresh food or per-diem
  - ◆ Miscellaneous land use agreement savings
  - ◆ Utilizing NERV vehicles instead of regular rentals
  - ◆ Early release of aviating assets
- Local resources such as hotels, restaurants, equipment, crews, overhead, fuel and supplies injected \$1,170,495 into the local economy during our tenure.
- There is a total of 7 claims, 3 are pending. There is a total of 9 burn injuries to date.

