

2022 East Fork Fire

Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge • Andreafsky Wilderness

Incident Summary

June 11-21



Photo by Operations Chief Karen Scholl



Alaska Type 2 Green Incident Management Team





Alaska Type 2 Green Incident Management Team, Incident Command Post, St. Mary's, Alaska.



Alaska Type 2 Green Incident Management Team, Fairbanks Pipeline Training Center.



East Fork Fire
June 11-21, 2022
St. Mary's, Alaska

Alaska Type 2 Green Incident Management Team



2022 East Fork Fire

The lightning-caused East Fork fire was first reported on May 31, 2022 and initially staffed by a load of smokejumpers to protect cabins and other allotments in the vicinity. Due to a continued warming and drying trend with a strong north wind, the smokejumpers established a Type 3 incident management organization and requested additional resources, including Chena Hotshots and reinforcement loads of smokejumpers. When the fire exceeded their ability to support the effort operationally, logistically, and administratively, the complexity analysis pointed toward ordering a Type 2 Incident Management Team (IMT). The Alaska Green Incident Management Team took command of the fire on Saturday, June 11. The next day, the IMT was delegated the Apoon Pass Fire, located approximately 20 miles northwest of the East Fork Fire.

The Incident Command Post (ICP) was established in St. Mary's at the elementary school with off-site support staff located at the Fairbanks Pipeline Training Center (FPTC). The communities of St. Mary's, Pitkas Point, Mountain Village, Pilot Station, and numerous cabins, allotments, and cultural sites were within the vicinity of the fire. St. Mary's and Pitkas Point were closer to the active fire edge and put into "Ready" evacuation status on June 10, with as many as 145 residents choosing to relocate

to a shelter established in Bethel by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation and operated by the Red Cross. The Alaska IMT recommended the "Ready" status be lifted at 1030 on Friday, June 17 and all temporary residents left the shelter by Saturday evening, June 18.

Operationally, an indirect line was constructed to protect St. Mary's, Pitkas Point, and Mountain Village to burn from, if needed. Favorable weather conditions allowed direct attack on the fire west of the Andreafsky River with fire bosses, smokejumpers, and hand crews. Existing fireline around Pilot Station was improved, but not used because the fire east of the East Fork of the Andreafsky River was stopped with direct attack strategies enabled by cooler and wetter weather conditions. Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) aerial ignitions were used to clean up unburned fuel between the two forks of the Andreafsky River. All fire perimeter south of the Andreafsky Wilderness has been contained or confined and is no longer threatening communities or allotments.

The Apoon Pass Fire was never staffed and remains in point zone protection strategy.

The Alaska Type 2 Green Incident Management Team transferred command of the East Fork and Apoon Pass Fires to a Type 3 incident management organization at 0700 on Wednesday, June 22.



Incident Commander

Our Strategic Objectives (planned end-state)

1. The communities of St Mary's, Pitkas Point, Mountain Village, and Pilot Station are protected without major injury or loss of life.
2. Cabins, Alaska Native Allotments, 14H1 cultural/historical sites, camps, weirs, and other values that may be damaged or destroyed by wildfire or by suppression efforts are identified and protected.
3. Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River values are maintained. Benefits associated with natural fire spread in fire-adapted systems are achieved where other values are not threatened. Any damage to natural systems caused by suppression efforts is repaired.
4. Relationships between the participating agencies, ANCSA Corporations, Tribes, and communities are strengthened.

Peter Butteri
Incident Commander

Our Delegated Authority

Protecting Unit

- Bureau of Land Management – Alaska Fire Service, Galena Zone

Jurisdictional Organizations

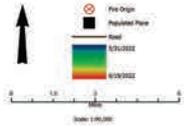
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge
- Bureau of Indian Affairs, Alaska Region (Alaska Native allotments)
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources (state, municipal, and private lands)
- Calista Corporation
- St. Mary's Native Corporation
- Azachorok, Inc.
- Pitka's Point Native Corporation



Progression

East Fork
AK-GAD-000160
June 20, 2022

163,533 acres at 6/19/2022 17:50

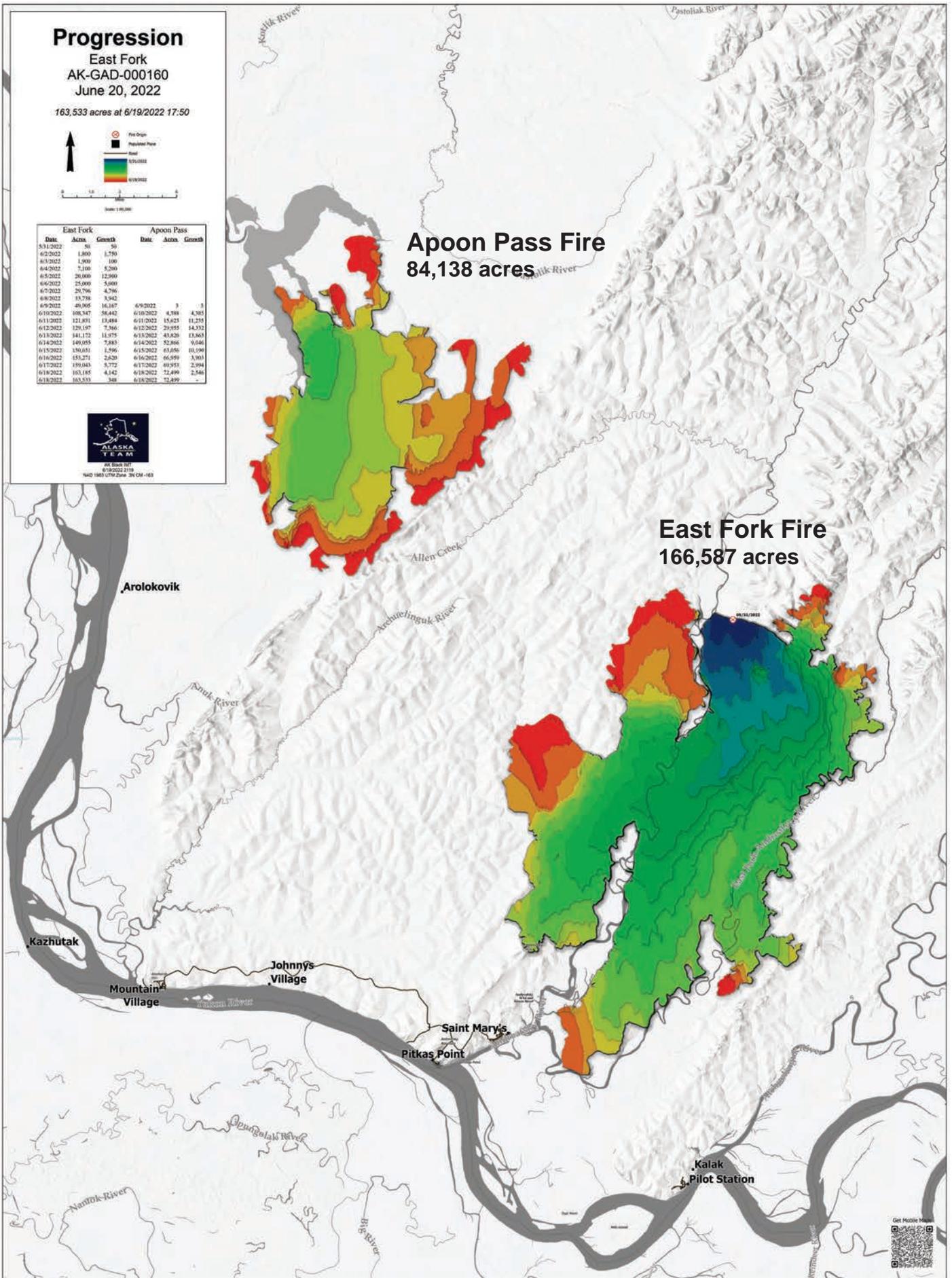


East Fork			Apoon Pass		
Date	Acres	Growth	Date	Acres	Growth
5/31/2022	50	50			
6/2/2022	1,800	1,750			
6/3/2022	1,900	100			
6/4/2022	7,100	5,200			
6/5/2022	20,000	12,900			
6/6/2022	25,000	5,000			
6/7/2022	29,706	4,706			
6/8/2022	33,778	3,942			
6/9/2022	49,905	16,127	6/9/2022	3	3
6/10/2022	108,347	58,442	6/10/2022	4,508	4,505
6/11/2022	121,891	13,544	6/11/2022	15,625	11,259
6/12/2022	129,197	7,306	6/12/2022	29,955	14,332
6/13/2022	141,172	11,975	6/13/2022	43,820	13,865
6/14/2022	149,055	7,883	6/14/2022	52,866	9,046
6/15/2022	150,651	1,596	6/15/2022	63,050	10,184
6/16/2022	153,271	2,620	6/16/2022	66,099	3,049
6/17/2022	159,043	5,772	6/17/2022	69,953	2,944
6/18/2022	163,185	4,142	6/18/2022	72,499	2,546
6/18/2022	163,533	348	6/18/2022	73,499	-



Apoon Pass Fire
84,138 acres

East Fork Fire
166,587 acres



11
Cooperators' meetings

50
Daily attendance (avg.)

1
Evacuation Alerts
(READY) June 6 - June 17

Liaison

- Assisted with defining the needs, roles, and procedures for integrating critical information to the shareholders.
- Facilitated discussions at daily cooperators' meetings to identify values at risk.
- Assisted public information officers gather information with concerns and questions in affected communities.
- Conveyed critical information and emergency procedures about existing utilities to the surrounding fire area, such as locations of water systems, communication sites, and fuel tanks.
- Relayed critical information about maintaining fueling operations, specifically, the burn rate for aviation.
- Fostered and strengthened relationships and created opportunities for future successes at the conclusion of this incident.
- Closely coordinated with Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Alaska Fire Service (AFS) Public Affairs Officer, Tribal and Regional and Village Native Corporations.

592,000
social media post reach

197,000
social media
engagements

37,000
social media reactions

Information

- Used multiple high- and low-technology platforms to broadcast and reach residents and community members.
- Recorded and published daily operational briefings on all social media platforms (Microsoft Teams, Zoom, What's App, Facebook, and others.)
- Conducted two community meetings to inform the public and partners of actions and milestones, while building positive relationships.
- Successfully managed a geographically dispersed information team located in St. Mary's ICP, FPTC, and virtual.
- Posted daily updates and maps around St. Mary's to inform the public of fire and management status.
- Ensured accountability of accurate information and successes.





The Andreafsky River near St. Mary's.

Safety

Key Decisions

- Assigned two additional SOFR from Operations to meet incident objectives.
- Supplied voluntary rapid COVID-19 tests to all personnel flying from Fort Wainwright to St. Mary's to prevent the spread of the virus to local populations.
- One positive COVID-19 team member was isolated at ICP to prevent further spread and meet Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines.
- All potable drinking water was flown to St. Mary's ICP.

Significant Event

- A Yellow medical incident occurred June 16. The individual was treated at the local clinic and released to their home unit.

Notable Successes

- An Emergency Medical Plan for the incident/ICP was developed.
- SOF2 served as the Incident Firefighter Health Coordinator for two days during MEDL transition.
- Developed Shelter-in-place Plan for St. Mary's ICP.

Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Poor radio coverage was resolved with the installation of an additional repeater.
- The BLM prohibition on the use and procurement of ATVs poses significant operational challenges in remote Alaska communities due to limited availability of UTVs and the inability to transport UTVs via aviation.





Operations Offices at St. Mary's ICP.

Operations

Key Decisions

- Set-up ICP in St. Mary's to ensure continuity of operations during the transition. The Team inherited an existing plan and modified priorities to put the right resources at the right place at the right time.
- Decision to go direct on the fire's western edge, with the change in the wind direction, kept fire away from the villages of Mountain Village, St. Mary's, and Pilot Station. This bought some credibility with the villages as we did not burn ground close to the villages.

Notable Successes

- Burnout operations between the two forks of the Andreafsky.
- Direct fireline on the southeast side of the fire protected Pilot Station and allotments along the Atchuelinguk River.
- Improvement of pre-existing fuel break around Pilot Station enabled firefighters to implement an additional containment line.
- UAS aerial platform was used to burnout approximately 3,000 acres, reducing firefighter exposure and risk, and secure line in inaccessible terrain.
- Acquired the right resources to herd the fire successfully into the Andreafsky Wilderness.

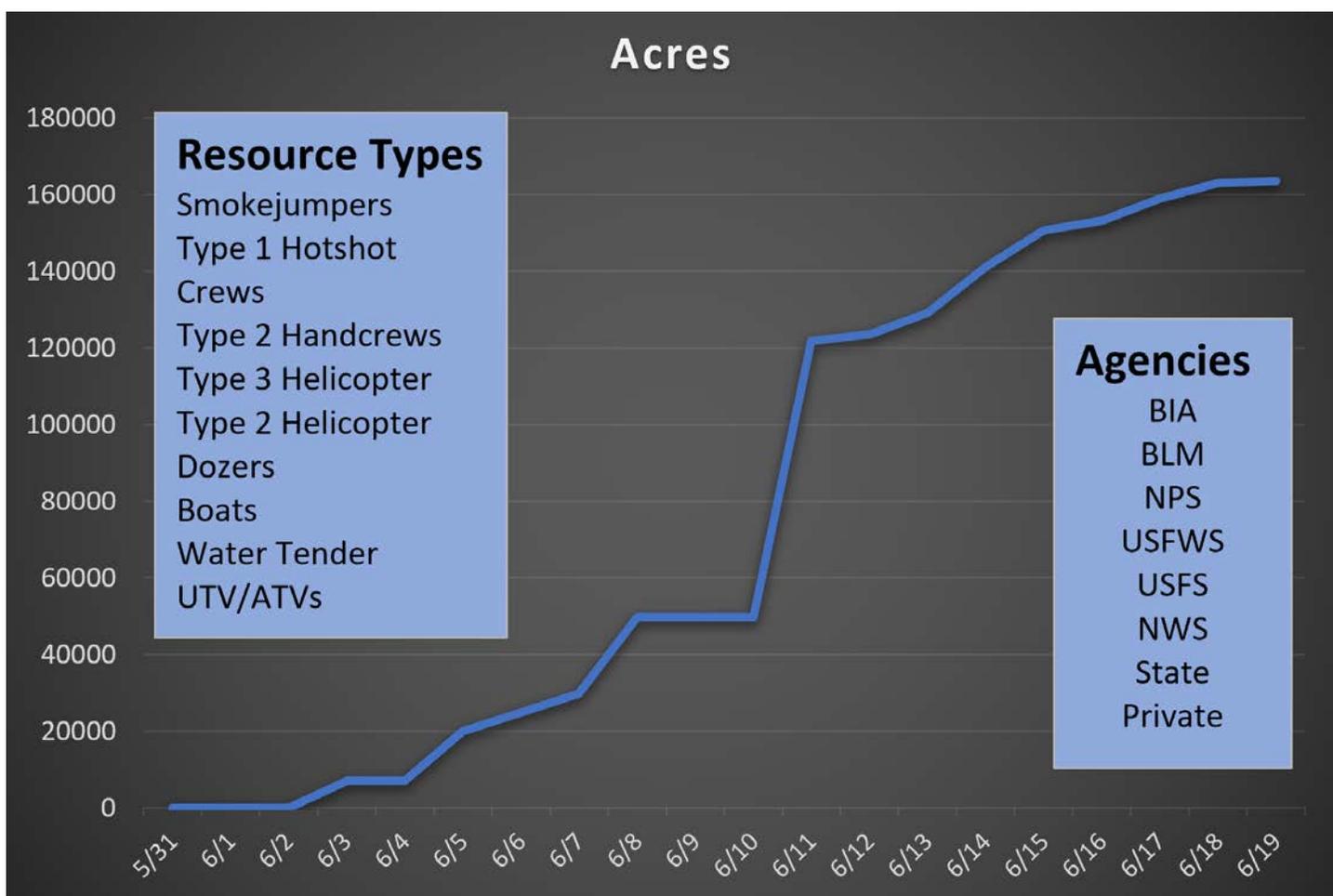
Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Tactical aircraft support over long distances during critical direct fireline construction forced a change in tactics, but ultimately proved to have little bearing on the success of containment on the western flank.
- During intense fire conditions and imminent threat to life and property, ATV use in villages was critical for overall success. UTV and ground transport availability limitations hindered operational effectiveness and tempo. ATVs were replaced by local vehicles and UTVs as soon as was practical. In the future, BLM should consider developing a policy exception and training program that would allow trained employees to operate ATVs as well as UTVs in remote villages.





Big River Crew members are residents from nearby villages.



Summary of burned acres, resources, and partners.





Everts Air brought in 2,500 gallons of JetA fuel to St. Mary's.

Air Operations

Key Decisions

- AOBD worked out of St. Mary's directly with Operations and helibase. ASGS remained in Fairbanks to coordinate logistical aircraft with the AFS Ramp, dispatch centers, and the Team's Logistics Section.
- Acquired a GCI Mifi to facilitate flight following, wifi calling, weather, and sending general messages. These devices were critical to success.
- Changed the TFR upon arrival to require civil aircraft to perform a westerly turn out, avoiding town overflights in case of holding operations with fixed-wing aircrafts.

Significant Event

- One SafeCom was filed (22-0396).

Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Vendors were buying fuel directly from Crowley with their company credit cards. The high price of fuel, combined with the \$300 callout fee after 1700 hours, resulted in vendors maxing out their credit cards. To resolve this issue, an agreement was put in place with Crowley for Jet A and 100LL so the vendors did not have to pay for the fuel with their cards.
- The Jet A fuel supply in St. Mary's was not sufficient to keep up with aviation needs. Fuel levels were drawn down to critical levels three days before the resupply barge was scheduled to arrive. To resolve the problem, the Team leased Crowley's fuel truck for a few days and ordered a fuel delivery from Everts to supply the few remaining days until the barge arrived. All fixed-wing aircraft were directed to fuel in Galena or Bethel for a few days to save the remaining fuel in St. Mary's for the helicopters.





Three helicopters were available on the fire for reconnaissance flights, moving crews to spike camps, and transporting sling loads.

- A lack of fixed-wing logistical aircraft to move people and cargo to St. Mary's was a challenge. No logistical fixed-wing aircraft was exclusively assigned to the incident. The Team was unable to keep up with the demand for personnel and cargo designated for St. Mary's. A long-term solution was not found to this challenge. Coordination among Galena Dispatch, the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC), and the BLM Alaska fixed-wing specialist identified priorities and possible aircraft for the next shift. Also, a cargo transport service was hired to take a large load of cargo to St. Mary's and return with a large load of backhaul. By hiring cargo transport as a one-time service, enough water and supplies were delivered to St. Mary's to sustain the Type 3 organization for the duration of the incident.
- The absence of an agency-wide fixed-wing aircraft cost-tracking system or protocol made cost collection for the logistical fixed-wing component difficult. This was exacerbated by the fact that the Team did not always know from day to day which aircraft would be arriving with cargo. Through coordination with the AICC, the AFS Ramp, and the helibase in St. Mary's, the Team was able to identify which fixed-wing aircrafts flew on the incident that day. They estimated flight hours by searching the teletype for each aircraft.
- Dispatch centers are understaffed, supporting multiple incidents and priorities, and do not have the luxury to dedicate a person to aircraft. This resulted in some miscommunications and dropped missions. Through coordination with AICC and Galena Dispatch, the Team facilitated the flow of information with expanded email lists and awareness up the chain to the next-level dispatch on requests so that AICC could anticipate requests.





Plans

Key Decisions

- Calibrated section staffing and schedule for incident complexity and logistical constraints by splitting the section between St. Mary's ICP and FRTC. RESL, ITSS, DOCL, SITL, GISS were positioned at ICP in staggered times upon arrival at incident.
- On-site printing at St. Mary's ICP reduced the time delay of field resources receiving outdated maps with inaccurate fire perimeters.
- Streamlined processes through the use of common medias such as Firenet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, eISuite, Sharepoint, and other programs.
- The use of the school as an ICP provided fast internet connectivity to overcome geographic distances and communication hurdles.
- DMOB used the "other" cells of eISuite to facilitate the need of charter flights and aid ASGS with flight scheduling.
- Established a good working relationship with Galena dispatch early on.

Significant Events

- Conducted several Strategic Risk Assessment and Complexity Analyses.
- ITSS support from AFS filled vital IT needs in Fairbanks.

Notable Successes

- Filling all key section positions.
- Using personnel at two different camps and virtually.
- IT implemented an infrastructure to support virtual meetings from either camp.
- St. Mary's ICP team members multi-tasked and fulfilled roles outside of their position for greater Team function, communication, and effectiveness.





View from the communications repeater location.

- Coordinated with Alaska's Type 2 IMT Black Team to share hard-to-fill positions and cross-train personnel.
- Facilitated Fort Wainwright gate access through AFS manager's office.
- Operations used groups instead of divisions to allow resources to move around the fire without IAP resource changes.
- Acquisition of 6 GCI phones to send to St. Mary's ICP.
- Timely coordination and communication with personnel of other functional areas to receive 209 inputs to overcome large geographic distances and technical challenges.
- Used Alaska IMT commercial air P.I. form that could be used by resources at all locations

Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Because of the time delay of resource order requests due to significant backlog, section members stepped up to help ordering.
- All fire personnel did not have up-to-date maps of fire perimeter, so arrangements were made to print at both camps.
- The delay of resources checking was addressed by more frequent conversations with DIVS.
- St. Mary's ICP (school) restricted access to some needed platforms like Zoom, Facebook, and other social media, so GCI technical support was notified to turn off Group Policy Object (GPO), which remedied the problem.
- The only cell service provider in the area is GCI. This created an inability for St. Mary's resources to communicate widely, which could be addressed by providing resources GCI phones and MiFis before flying out to remote villages.





Logistics

Key Decisions

- Established an ICP at a forward location while the rest of IMT was at a rear operating base in Fairbanks.
- A staging area manager should be ordered with the Team when multiple camps exist over great distances supplied only by aircraft.

Significant Event

- Used AFS personnel to assist with the set-up of communication equipment.

Notable Successes

- Moved over 100,000 pounds of supplies—food, water, and other goods to the remote ICP.
- Installed an additional repeater for greater coverage.
- Hired a cook for ICP.
- Assigned “S” numbers to Land Use Agreements (LUA) quickly.
- Transportation forms continued throughout assignment even without agreements, fuel blanket purchase agreement, or account system.
- An air logistics position, such as ASGS, to manage daily priorities of supplies and personnel was critical.
- Developed best practice for hiring, air cargo transportation, equipment, and personnel with INBA, buying team, expanded, dispatch, and finance.





Supplies arrive on a barge on the Yukon River.

Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- The challenge of hiring and paying local people was overcome by collaboratively working with finance, IBA, buying team, and training departments.
- Due to the lack of aviation support, a back log of back haul is slowing moving, but will far exceed the time of the Team.
- A lack of consistent air support to supply vital supplies such as food, water, supplies, water handling equipment, and other necessary goods is still being mitigated, but is somewhat alleviated by hiring a larger commercial air cargo transportation.
- Accounting for dozers, boats, trucks, ATV's, and other large equipment in use on an on-going incident without agreements, inspections, rates, or contracts was a challenge. To address this, the Team worked collaboratively with ordering, buying team, and IBA to resolve EERA, "S" number, and "E" number issues.
- Voluntary COVID-19 testing at the AFS ramp prior to St. Mary's departures was a challenge that was remedied by ordering a Firefighter Health Coordinator.
- The lack of COVID-19 testing kits resulting in 1 COVID-positive person flying to St. Mary's. This person was tested upon landing and was isolated in St. Mary's.





A backing fire was common after the wind switched and enabled direct attack strategies.

Weather and Fire Behavior

Key Decisions

- Keeping IMET in Fairbanks and sending FBAN to St. Mary's ICP. It was vital to have a presence on scene at incident.
- FBAN consulted with local Alaska BLM fire analyst for the AICC before flying to St. Mary's ICP for further instruction on the unique environment of Alaska, Canadian fuel models, and numerous information sources.

Significant Events

- Ordering an Air Resource Advisor to handle smoke forecasting so the IMET and FBAN could focus on their jobs. Smoke forecasting was critical for communicating health air quality levels to the public and firefighting personnel.
- Operations facilitated a reconnaissance flight of the entire fire.

Notable Success

- Overcoming communication difficulties of IMET and FBAN being in different locations.

Significant Challenge and Resolution

- Because the IMET was located several hundred miles away, multiple forms of media and communication were used with FBAN.





The Apoon Pass Fire rapidly expanded across the dry tundra grasses in early days of the fire.



Fire Behavior Analyst John Kern

An air quality monitor (PurpleAir sensor) was installed at the St. Mary's Elementary School to provide the community with local, real-time information. [See local information here.](#)





Apoon Pass.

Finance

Key Decisions

- Divided staff among St. Mary's ICP and FPTC.
- Conducted training sessions in person and virtually for rapidly changing processes in the last two years.

Notable Successes

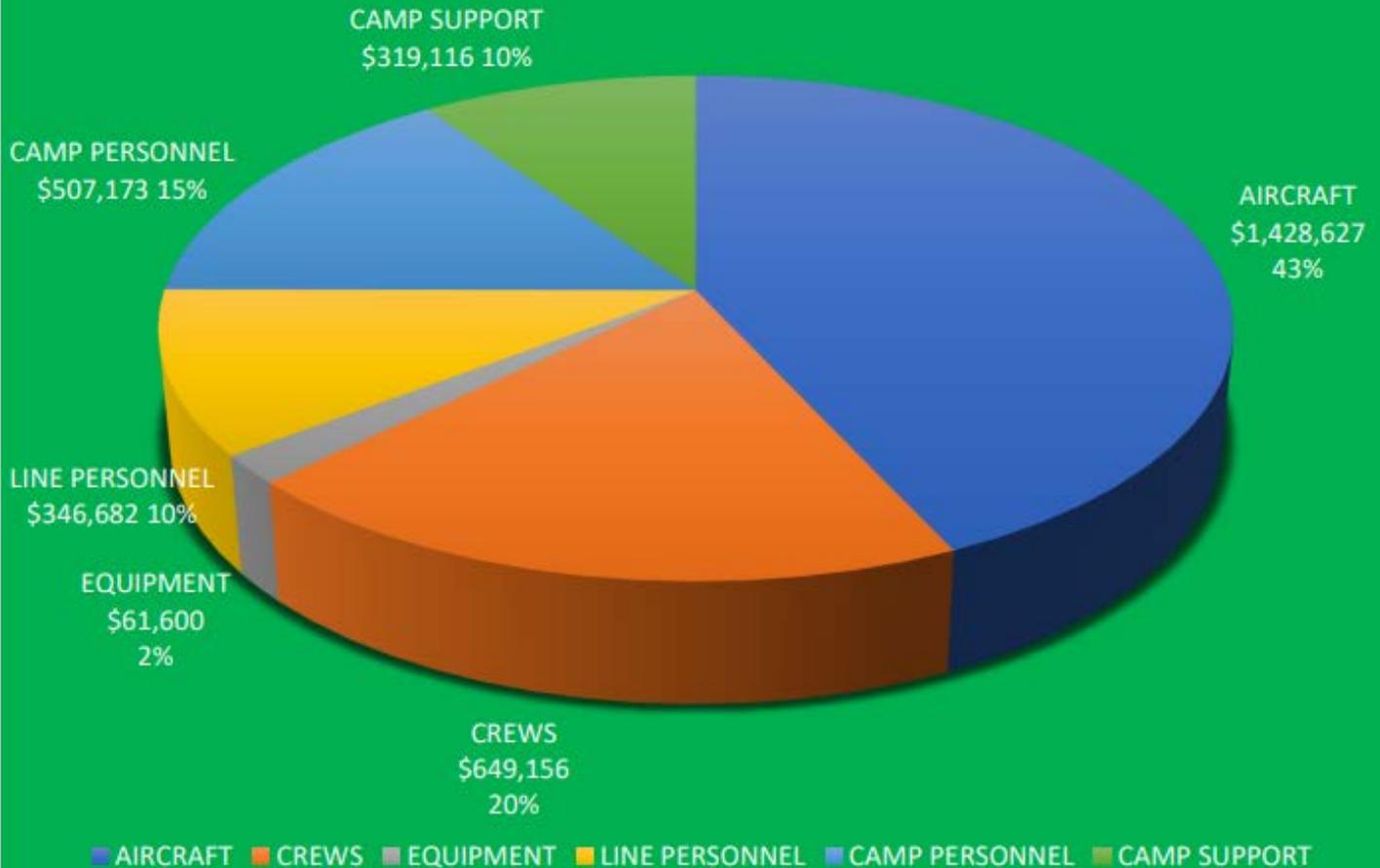
- Established a protocol for submitting financial documents from the field and electronically filing them, which allowed adequate time to audit.
- Assigned a federal national buying team with contracting officers.
- Adding "placeholder" to the system to capture costs for known resources.

Significant Challenges and Resolutions

- Delays in receiving financial documents, agreements, and resource orders were addressed by submitting requests for additional personnel to support ordering.
- Hiring and paying local people as AD employees was a challenge addressed by developing a process to facilitate hiring and assigning a dedicated position.
- AD hires must have IS100 and IS700 to be entered into IROC/ordered, which created significant challenges. To address this, the State of Alaska should require Fire Host Unit's sign-up ADs; federal land management agencies should explore exempting lower-graded positions from requiring IS100 and IS700; and the Team should consider negotiating Land Use Agreements positions into the price of the facility.
- BUYT was not familiar with uniqueness of Alaska's remoteness and methods of travel. They should be provided a better in-briefing or training for Alaska incidents.
- Alaska vendors do not have agreements in VIPR or registered in SAM.gov and an EERA must be made. To make this an easier process, have local contracting officers set up agreements pre-season in fire-prone villages and communities, and/or send contracting officers to villages when the Team is ordered.



**Butteri's Green IMT2
East Fork (AK-GAD-000160)
Total Cost - \$3,312,354
6/17/2022**



WFDSS WATCH	
Date:	6/17/2022
Incident Name:	EAST FORK
Incident Number:	AK-GAD-000160
WFDSS Budget:	\$10,000,000
WFDSS Balance:	\$6,687,634
Cost Yesterday:	\$318,968
WFDSS Blown In:	20 days



Photo by Fire Behavior Analyst John Kern



Alaska Type 2 Green Incident Management Team

East Fork Fire ● June 21, 2022