



For Immediate Release: Jan. 21, 2022

Governor Dunleavy proposes name change for Division of Forestry

New title would be Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Protection

(Anchorage, AK) – Governor Mike Dunleavy has introduced an Executive Order that would change the name of the Alaska Division of Forestry to the Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Division Director Helge Eng states, “The Division’s current name no longer represents the full range of its responsibilities and priorities.” The proposed name change “clearly reflects the public safety fire suppression responsibilities of the Division, as well as its forestry duties,” he said.

Barring opposition from the Alaska Legislature, the name change will take effect July 1, 2022. The Executive Order was read across the legislative floor on the opening day of the 2022 legislative session in Juneau on Tuesday.

Alaska and the nation now face more intense and longer fire seasons due to increasingly hot and dry summers and forest insect and disease outbreaks. In addition, Alaskans have increasingly chosen to live in high-fire-risk, wildland-urban interface areas. An estimated 80% of Alaska’s population live in areas considered high risk for wildland fire.

The proposed name change also aligns with Governor Dunleavy’s intent to strengthen Alaska’s public safety sector, including fire organizations. The Division of Forestry is currently registered as a fire department under the State Fire Marshal’s Office and holds a seat in the Alaska State Fire Chiefs Association.

“Given the demands placed on our firefighters as a result of longer, more intense fire seasons, both in Alaska and the Lower 48, this name change is welcome,” the Division’s Wildland Fire & Aviation Chief, Norm McDonald, said. “Our firefighters take great pride in the work they do protecting their fellow Alaskans.”

The Division’s wildfire protection program has grown exponentially. Today, more than 90 percent of the Division’s budget is spent on protecting the life and property of Alaskans from wildfire.

“Protecting Alaskans from increased wildfire danger is now an equally important aspect of the Division’s duties and this Executive Order for the name change helps reflect that,” Governor Dunleavy said. “Our firefighters deserve to be recognized for the job they do protecting the lives and property of Alaskans from wildfire and adding Fire Protection to the agency name helps accomplish that.”

If approved, the name change will help the Division achieve multiple objectives, including:

- Communicating the Division’s important role in protecting the lives and property of Alaskans from wildfire.
- Improving the division’s ability to recruit and retain skilled professional firefighters.
- Helping the Division obtain federal grants to assist in hazard fuels reduction, training and developing fire crews, and acquiring firefighting gear and equipment.

The name change will have no costs associated with it. Existing physical equipment and supplies will be used until they wear out, and new equipment and supplies will bear the new name of the Division when obtained, Eng said.

CONTACT: DOF public information officer Tim Mowry, (907) 590-4038 or tim.mowry@alaska.gov