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New woodcutting areas will help reduce Mat-Su Valley wildfire risk

(Palmer, AK) – The Alaska Division of Forestry has established five new personal-use firewood cutting sites in the Mat-Su Valley to help reduce wildland fire risk and address safety concerns associated with beetle-killed spruce.

“These new firewood areas are intended to provide the public with access to beetle-killed spruce for personal-use heating needs, while simultaneously addressing wildland fire and safety risks posed by extensive spruce beetle kill in the region,” said Mat-Su Area Forester Stephen Nickel.

Two of the new cutting corridors are in the Zero Lake Road area in Houston, and three new cutting corridors have been opened along Willer-Kash Road in Willow. In addition to providing fuel wood for residents, the new cutting areas will serve as shaded fuel breaks in the event of wildfires in the area. Firewood harvesting in the new sites is limited to dead, beetle-killed spruce only. Live birch, alder and cottonwood trees will be left standing to create the shaded fuel breaks.

The cutting areas are in the right-of-way corridors alongside of the roads and extend 150-300 feet, depending on their location and on which side of the road they lie. The roads provide access for prompt initial attack in the event of wildfires, and the wider corridors provide a safer area for fire crews to work. Removing beetle-killed spruce also reduces the fuel load for potential fires.

In total, the Mat-Su Area Forestry office now has ten personal-use firewood harvesting sites in the Mat-Su Valley. Seven of the sites are for beetle-killed spruce only, while three allow for harvest of live birch.

Permits for personal-use firewood harvest are available through the Alaska Division of Forestry’s online permit system, at <https://dnr.alaska.gov/FPS>. For information about spruce beetles, visit <http://forestry.alaska.gov/insects/sprucebeetle>.

CONTACT: Stephen Nickel, 907-761-6301, stephen.nickel@alaska.gov

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