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State forestry division awards grants to Alaska fire departments

(Fairbanks, AK) – Almost three dozen fire departments around the state will be better equipped to help suppress both structure and wildland fires thanks to grants from the Alaska Division of Forestry (DOF).

DOF recently awarded more than \$159,000 to 34 rural fire departments around the state to improve firefighting capabilities and enhance protection in the wildland-urban interface.

The funds come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS) to the Division of Forestry each year as part of the federal Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) program. DOF distributes the money to rural volunteer fire departments that apply for the annual grants. To qualify for the grants, fire departments must serve a population of 10,000 or less, be a registered fire department with the Alaska Division of Fire & Life Safety and provide a minimum of 10 percent non-federal matching funds.

Fire departments use the money to purchase items such as personal protective equipment, hoses, pumps, tools and other resources used to help fight both structure and wildland fires.

“Local fire departments in rural towns and villages around Alaska play an integral role in helping DOF attack wildfires and protect our communities,” said DOF Wildland Fire & Aviation Chief Norm McDonald. “They are crucial in helping us achieve our goal of limiting 90 percent of wildfires in critical and full management option areas near our communities to less than 10 acres. These grants help the smaller departments get the resources they need to help us accomplish our mission and protect the lives and homes of Alaskans.”

Nearly all of the fire departments that received grants have cooperating agreements with DOF to assist help suppress wildfires in their service areas.

DOF annually provides from \$150,000 to \$225,000 in VFA grant funds to fire departments. In 2020, state forestry awarded \$225,000 to 33 fire departments around

the state. The goal of the grant program is to help improve fire protection capabilities in unprotected or inadequately protected areas. DOF fire management officers and other fire staff meet in the early spring to review and discuss applications and award funding.

The Port Alsworth Volunteer Fire Department in remote Southwest Alaska, for example, received \$4,499 to purchase a portable pump to fill its 1,000-gallon tanker truck from Lake Clark. The city lacks a community water system and uses the lake as its water source. The pump will be installed on an all-terrain vehicle trailer that can easily be transported to various locations within the community, as well as loaded on a boat for transport around the lake.

The Tri-Valley Volunteer Fire Department along the Parks Highway in Healy was awarded \$5,000 to purchase a portable rapid fill station. The department uses a 4,500-gallon water tender to supply water for both structural and wildland fires but relies on well water from various locations around the area, some of which require a 30-minute, one-way drive. The portable rapid fill station will allow the department to locate the fill site closer to fires and to draw water from streams, rivers, ponds or lakes.

Chena-Goldstream Fire & Rescue outside of Fairbanks received \$5,000 to purchase 35 pairs of fire-proof pants that can be used “to ensure that crews will be ready to respond at a moment’s notice to wildland calls with the proper PPE,” the department wrote in its application.

Fire departments could apply for up to \$5,000 in grant funds. The money received cannot be used for repair, construction or purchase of buildings, land acquisition, emergency medical equipment, computers or computer software and other specified items.

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Fire Department	DOF Area Office	Amount
Delta Junction VFD	Delta	\$4,972
Rural Deltana VFD	Delta	\$4,973
McKinley VFD	Fairbanks	\$4,961
Tri-Valley VFD	Fairbanks	\$5,000
Chena Goldstream Fire & Rescue	Fairbanks	\$5,000
City of Anderson VFD	Fairbanks	\$4,999
Steese Area VFD	Fairbanks	\$4,500
Women's Bay VFD	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,350
Nililchik Emergency Services	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,779
Cooper Landing VFD	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,449
Kachemak Emergency Services	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,986
Bayside Fire Station	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,500
Anchor Point Fire & Emergency Svcs.	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,998
Nikiski FD	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,626
Kenai FD	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,975
Homer VFD	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,999
Seward FD	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,979
Lowell Point VFD	Kenai/Kodiak	\$4,995
Houston FD	Mat-Su	\$4,608
Caswell Lakes Fire Station	Mat-Su	\$4,988
Sutton VFD	Mat-Su	\$3,224
West Lakes FD	Mat-Su	\$4,886
Willow VFD	Mat-Su	\$4,973
Butte FD	Mat-Su	\$4,971
Palmer Fire and Rescue	Mat-Su	\$4,875
Talkeetna VFD	Mat-Su	\$5,000
Whale Pass VFD	Southeast	\$2,215
Aniak VFD	Southwest	\$4,590
Port Alsworth VFD	Southwest	\$4,499
Tok VFD	Tok	\$4,035
Northway VFD	Tok	\$4,625
Kennecott/McCarthy VFD	Valdez/Copper River	\$4,997
Gakona VFD	Valdez/Copper River	\$5,000
Valdez FD	Valdez/Copper River	\$4,500
TOTAL		\$159,027