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Department of
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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Legislature approves name change for Division of Forestry

Agency will be Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection starting July 1

(Anchorage, AK) – Facing no opposition from the Alaska Legislature, an Executive Order introduced by Governor Mike Dunleavy in January to change the name of the Alaska Division of Forestry to the Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection was approved on Friday, March 18. The name change will go into effect on July 1, 2022.

The new title more clearly reflects the public safety and fire suppression responsibilities of the agency, as well as its forestry duties, said Division of Forestry Director Helge Eng, who requested the name change. Many people are not aware of the Division's firefighting responsibilities even though the agency provides wildland fire suppression for more than 152 million acres that includes the state's most populated areas.

"This name change reinforces the fact that the Division of Forestry & Fire Protection is Alaska's fire department and that wildland fire suppression is one of our two primary missions, along with forestry management," Eng said. "Our firefighting mission has intensified in recent years with longer, more complex fire seasons in both Alaska and the Lower 48."

The name change also aligns with Governor Dunleavy's drive 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.

"This is just a small step in recognizing the important role the Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection has in protecting Alaskans from wildfire," Gov. Mike Dunleavy said.

Alaska and the nation are dealing with more intense and longer fire seasons due to increasingly hot and dry summers and forest insect and disease outbreaks. In addition, a large percentage of Alaskans 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.

“Wildland fire protection and management is a huge part of what our Division does. Recognizing that workload and the dangerous job we are asking our firefighters to do is distinguished from the important resource management function with this name change.” Wildland Fire & Aviation Program Manager Norm McDonald said. “Wildland firefighting in Alaska and nationally gets more challenging every year; communicating our role and the challenges to the public will definitely assist with fire prevention.

The Division’s wildfire protection program has taken on a significant workload in recent years. Today, more than 90 percent of the Division’s budget is directed to protecting the life and property of Alaskans from wildfire with approximately 500 fire responses a year. The Division employs more than 200 permanent and seasonal firefighters and hires additional temporary emergency assistance as danger and activity increases.

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

- Communicating the Division’s critical role in protecting the lives and property of Alaskans from wildfire.
- Improving the division’s ability to recruit and retain skilled professional firefighters.
- Reinforce the Division’s prevention and enforcement responsibilities and mission of reducing human caused fires.

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.

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