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Department of
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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska wildland fire season is here

Division of Forestry burn permits are required for any open burning starting on April 1

(Fairbanks, AK) – Don't let all that snow fool you, Alaska's wildfire season officially begins on April 1 and Alaskans should prepare accordingly.

Alaska's statutory wildland fire season starts on April 1 and extends through August 31, barring an emergency extension. And like fishing, hunting, or driving in Alaska, a state burn permit is required to legally use a burn barrel or burn brush piles on state, municipal or private lands during that time.

The burn permit requirement helps minimize the number of human-caused wildfires in Alaska by providing guidelines to permit holders related to the size of burn piles, what materials may be burned and other safe burning requirements that reduce the chances of a fire escaping.

"Burn permits aren't meant to be a hassle; they are designed to reduce the number of human-caused wildfires and protect Alaskans and their communities," Division of Forestry Deputy Director of Fire Protection Norm McDonald said. "Human-caused fires account for roughly 75% of the fires the Division of Forestry responds to and most are avoidable. If people follow the guidelines on the permit the chance of starting a wildfire is minimal."

Burn permits are free and available at state forestry offices in Delta Junction, Fairbanks, Glennallen, Haines, Ketchikan, McGrath, Palmer, Soldotna and Tok, as well as local fire departments in many of those same areas. Permits can also be printed online at <https://dnr.alaska.gov/burn>. Burn permits are NOT required for camping, cooking or warming fires less than three feet in diameter with flame lengths less than two feet high.

People violating burn permit requirements can be cited and held both criminally and civilly liable for damage caused by an escaped fire, which can run into the millions of dollars.

People who intend to burn brush this spring are encouraged to do so now, when fire danger is low, rather than wait until conditions dry out and the potential for starting a wildfire are higher. Likewise, anyone who burned debris piles over the winter should check to make sure they are completely extinguished and there is no chance they could rekindle.

“The remnants of large debris piles can retain heat for weeks or months and start a wildfire when conditions dry out,” McDonald said. “Go check your old burn piles now to make sure they won’t be a problem later.”

Despite a well above-average snowpack in many parts of the state this past winter, it’s too early to predict what this summer’s fire season holds. The weather in May and early June has far more influence on fire season than winter snowpack. Given the heavy snowpack, a later-than-normal melt out is expected, which could delay the start of fire season, at least in the Interior region. Once the snow melts, however, it’s a matter of how quickly fuels dry out that dictates fire activity and behavior.

“While it may look like it’s going to be a late start to the fire season right now, conditions can change quickly,” McDonald said. “Our intention is to have our firefighting personnel trained up and ready to start fighting fires on April 1.”

Like many states in the western U.S., Alaska has seen a trend toward earlier, longer, and more intense fire seasons in the last 20 years. Five out of the 10 largest fire seasons on record in Alaska since 1950 have occurred since 2004. The 2021 Alaska fire season was well below average, with only 384 fires burning an estimated 254,500 acres. In a typical year, Alaska has about 500 wildfires that burn between 650,000 and 1 million acres. The last time Alaska surpassed 1 million acres burned in a season was 2019 when nearly 2.6 million acres burned.

“Alaska is known as the Land of Extremes and that applies to wildfires, as well,” McDonald said. “The last two fire seasons have been fairly moderate but it only take a couple days of drying followed by lightning and wind to quickly stress our resources. Alaskans need to be vigilant about using safe burning practices, preventing human-caused fires, and preparing themselves and their homes for wildfire season.”

In addition to state burn permit requirements, local governments may prohibit open burning or use of burn barrels within some municipal and city boundaries. Residents need to check with their local fire department to determine if burning is allowed in their area.

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