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PRESS RELEASE

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## **State forestry, Mat-Su Borough offer free brush disposal sites**

*Valley residents can drop off spruce-beetle-infested wood to be chipped*

**(Palmer, AK)** – The Alaska Division of Forestry and Matanuska-Susitna Borough are partnering to help protect homes and reduce human-caused wildfires in the Mat-Su Valley by offering free brush and slash disposal sites.

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State forestry is providing funding as part of an existing cooperative agreement with the borough to ensure residents can drop off spruce-beetle-infested wood and winter windstorm damaged trees at designated sites free of charge. The debris will be safely burned or chipped by borough staff. Providing designated drop-off sites will reduce debris burning and the potential for escaped fires, which is the leading cause of wildfires in the Valley, said Division of Forestry, Wildland Fire & Aviation Program Chief Norm McDonald.

The Mat-Su Valley has been hit hard by winter windstorms and an ongoing spruce beetle outbreak. Valley residents have a huge workload to remove hazardous trees, blow down, and slash created by the severe weather events this winter. The primary purpose of the program is to assist residents in creating defensible space around their homes and reduce the need for debris pile burning. Funding for the program was made available through the U.S. Forest Service in the form of a spruce beetle mitigation grant, as well as fuels mitigation funding through the State of Alaska.

“Anything we can do to reduce the number of human-caused fires and assist residents creating defensible space around their home increases public safety and reduces fire suppression costs,” McDonald said. “Having these disposal sites available saves people time and the risk of an escaped debris burn fire, which traditionally has been our most common wildland fire cause in residential areas.”

The drop-off sites were established in 2019 on a small scale. With funding assistance from the Division of Forestry and involvement of the Mat-Su Borough Department of Emergency Services and Department of Public Works this program will be available

through 2022. Last year, more than 2,100 tons of spruce-beetle-infested brush was collected and disposed of at the designated drop-off sites.

“The borough appreciates funding assistance from state forestry to help maintain these drop-off sites and reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfires in the Mat-Su Valley,” Mat-Su Borough Emergency Manager Casey Cook said. “This program has been extremely successful, and this added funding will help homeowners deal with ongoing spruce-beetle and wind-damaged trees which has resulted in dangerous fuel loading.”

The borough is staffing the disposal sites and providing the machinery to safely burn and chip the debris and slash. The disposal sites are set up at the following areas:

- Central Landfill, 1201 N. 49<sup>th</sup> State St., Palmer. Open 7 days per week, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Accepts brush and trees. Logs must be shorter than 8 feet in length.
- Big Lake Transfer Station, 13582 Hollywood Road, Big Lake. Open Friday through Tuesday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Accepts brush and trees. Loads are limited to 5 cubic yards per truck load and must be shorter than 8 feet in length.
- Willow Transfer Station, 15469 Willow Transfer Station Road. Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 10 am. to 5 p.m. Accepts brush and trees. Loads are limited to 5 cubic yards per truck load and must be shorter than 8 feet in length.
- Talkeetna Transfer Station, 25195 S. Talkeetna Spur, Talkeetna. Open Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Accepts brush and trees starting on June 1 and continues through September 30. Loads are limited to 5 cubic yards per truck load and must be shorter than 8 feet in length.

For more information about the borough’s free brush disposal sites, go to the [Mat-Su Borough’s fire preparedness website](#). For information about Firewise and creating defensible space around your home, check out the [Firewise Alaska brochure](#).

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