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Department of
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PRESS RELEASE

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State forestry awards grants to 40 rural Alaska fire departments

More than \$186,000 distributed to help bolster fire preparedness

(Anchorage, AK) – Forty rural fire departments in Alaska will be better equipped to fight both structure and wildland fires after receiving Volunteer Fire Assistance grants from the Alaska Division of Forestry (DOF).

DOF recently awarded more than \$186,000 to rural fire departments around the state to improve firefighting capabilities and enhance wildfire protection in the wildland-urban interface. Funding for the program was made available through the U.S. Forest Service as part of the federal Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) program to help improve fire protection in inadequately protected areas.

Fire departments use the money to purchase items such as personal protective equipment, hoses, pumps, portable water tanks, tools and other resources used to help fight both structure and wildland fires. Local fire departments are critical in helping the Division of Forestry accomplish its mission of protecting Alaskans from wildfire, said DOF Wildland Fire & Aviation Chief Norm McDonald.

“This funding helps local fire departments better prepare and respond to both structure fires and wildfires in their communities,” McDonald said. “We rely heavily on our local cooperators and these grants help those departments obtain resources they otherwise can’t afford.”

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% non-federal matching funds. Nearly all of the fire departments receiving grants have cooperating agreements with DOF to help suppress wildfires in their service areas.

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.

DOF annually provides VFA grant funds to fire departments around Alaska. In 2021, state forestry awarded more than \$159,000 to 34 fire departments around the state.

The Tri-Valley Volunteer Fire Department in Healy received \$4,976 and will use some of that money to purchase a 5,000-gallon portable water tank which will be used in concert with a 4,500-gallon water tender to provide a continuous supply of water for both wildland and structure fires.

Girdwood Volunteer Fire & Rescue also plans to purchase a portable water tank and metal nozzles with some of the \$4,755.98 it received. Half of the department's service area does not have fire hydrants and the department does not currently have a portable water tank.

"Having a portable water tank and additional nozzles will expand our capacity to be prepared for an interface fire and strengthen our capacity to deploy as a Division of Forestry cooperator," the department wrote in its application.

Kachemak Emergency Service in Homer will use some of the \$4,981.50 grant it received to purchase three six-horsepower floating firefighting pumps.

"The portable floating pumps will allow us to use water supply sources in hard-to-get places where water resources are not easily accessible," the department stated in its application.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's West Lakes Fire Service Area will purchase 21 100-foot sections of 1 ½ inch hose and 10 100-foot sections of 1-inch hose with a portion of the \$3,910.77 grant it received.

"Having more hose available ensures we can quickly respond to wildland emergencies," the department wrote in its application. "When we have multiple or big-scale wildland fires having more hose ensures our apparatus stay in service throughout the emergency."

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