



## *Media Release*

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Contact: Tim Mowry, Division of Forestry, (907) 356-5512  
Beth Ipsen, Alaska Fire Service, (907) 356-5510

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### **Dry conditions prompt wildfire safety warnings for Memorial Day weekend**

(Fairbanks, AK) – With extremely dry conditions persisting across much of Alaska, wildland fire managers are asking the public to be mindful of the potential for wildfires during Memorial Day weekend.

“For many Alaskans, Memorial Day weekend marks the unofficial start of summer,” Alaska Division of Forestry Wildland Fire & Aviation Program Manager Norm McDonald said. “We know lots of people are going to be out camping, hiking, boating, barbecuing and enjoying other forms of recreation over the holiday weekend. We just ask them to be extremely careful when it comes to the potential for starting a wildfire.”

A burn permit suspension implemented by the Alaska Division of Forestry on May 1 remains in effect on state, private and municipal lands for all of the state with the exception of Southeast Alaska. The suspension prohibits the use of burn barrels, burning of brush piles and burning of lawns. The burn permit suspension was put in place to reduce human-caused wildfires due to concerns with COVID-19 and the impacts it could have on importing firefighting personnel to Alaska from the Lower 48. Since then, however, the fire danger in many areas of the state has intensified due to dry, windy conditions that have increased the likelihood of human-caused wildfire starts.

While campfires three feet or less in diameter with flame lengths less than two feet high are allowed during a burn permit suspension, fire managers advise against having a campfire in these dry conditions unless it is absolutely necessary. May has been an extremely dry month in most parts of mainland Alaska. Only one one-hundredth (0.01) of an inch of rain has been recorded at both the Anchorage and Fairbanks airports and only a trace of precipitation has been recorded in McGrath, according to the National Weather Service. While spring greenup is occurring around the state, the lack of precipitation has left dead surface fuels very dry and

susceptible to ignition. Despite the nearly statewide burn permit suspension, the Division of Forestry continues to respond to numerous illegal burning activities that have resulted in several wildfires.

Alaska's wildfire season officially started April 1 and wildland firefighters have already responded to fire calls. As of Wednesday, there have been 86 wildfires recorded around the state that have burned approximately 238 acres. Nearly half of those fires – 40 – have been in the Mat-Su Valley, which has already seen two significant fires – the 130-acre Trumpeter fire at Point MacKenzie and the 56-acre Moose Meadows fire just north of Wasilla last weekend. All the fires recorded so far this season have been caused by humans.

Here are a few tips from the Alaska Division of Forestry, BLM Alaska Fire Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service to help prevent wildfires this weekend and the rest of the summer:

- Never leave a fire unattended.
- In areas where open burning is allowed, make sure you have a Division of Forestry burn permit and follow the safe burning guidelines listed on it. Call your local state forestry office or go online to ensure burning is allowed on the day you want to burn.
- Clear areas around campfires down to mineral soil to reduce the chances of escapement.
- Keep campfires small and manageable.
- Have tools and water on hand to prevent fires from escaping.
- Make sure campfires are completely extinguished before you leave them, by repeatedly drowning them with water and stirring the coals/ashes until they are cold to the touch.
- Dispose of barbecue ashes or coals in a fireproof container; do not dump them in the woods.
- Call 911 immediately if there is a wildland fire emergency.

Information about safe burning practices is available at local forestry offices, local fire departments and online at <http://forestry.alaska.gov/burn>. A directory of statewide forestry offices can be found at <http://forestry.alaska.gov>.

Remember, you are responsible for any fire you start.

For statewide fire information, call 907-356-5511 or visit the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center website at <https://fire.ak.blm.gov> or go to <http://akfireinfo.com>.

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