

Corri A. Feige
Commissioner



Department of
Natural Resources

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Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: May 6, 2021

May 9 to 15 is Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week

(Fairbanks, AK) – With the winter snowpack melting away, days growing longer and temperatures heating up, wildland fire season in Alaska has arrived.

To help raise awareness, Governor Mike Dunleavy has proclaimed May 9-15 as “Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week in Alaska.” The governor joins fire managers from the Alaska Division of Forestry, Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service, and the U.S. Forest Service in urging Alaskans to take responsibility for protecting their homes and communities this summer by preventing human-caused wildfires and taking steps to fireproof their homes.

“The boreal forest of Alaska is a wildfire-driven ecosystem, so it’s not a matter of if there will be wildfires but when and where,” said Governor Dunleavy. “As individuals and communities, we need to do our part to prevent human-caused wildfires and be vigilant to help preserve our homes, communities, infrastructure and natural resources.”

The proclamation declares the governor’s desire to “encourage all Alaskans to recognize the importance of wildfires to the Alaskan landscape, be aware of their potential for damage, and commit to educating themselves on how to reduce the threat of wildland fires to our homes, property, and community.”

The wildfire season officially began April 1, when the Division of Forestry began requiring burn permits for any outdoor open burning or burn barrel use on state, municipal or private lands in Alaska. All but one of the 38 fires reported so far this season were caused by humans, mostly resulting from escaped debris burns or escaped burn barrel fires. While these fires have been small, some have threatened homes and required division wildland firefighters and local fire departments to respond.

More than 60 percent of wildfires in Alaska are human-caused, and because they tend to occur close to urban areas where most people live and recreate, they are often the most dangerous.

The pre-green-up conditions at this time of year are some of the most dangerous of the wildfire season because the dead, dry grass exposed by the melting snow requires only a spark to ignite and escalate into a wildfire.

“People don’t realize how quickly a small grass fire can spread out of control at this time of year, especially if there is any kind of wind,” said division Wildland Fire and Aviation Chief Norm McDonald. “If you are doing any kind of burning, whether it’s brush piles or using a burn barrel, it’s tremendously important to get a burn permit and follow the safe burning guidelines listed on it.”

With hotter, drier days and lightning-caused fires on the horizon, Alaskans need to do everything they can now to prepare themselves and their homes for potential wildfires, McDonald said.

“Spend a weekend cleaning up around your house,” he said. “Clean the leaves and spruce needles out of your gutters. Move any firewood away from the house. Limb up any trees close to your house. Make sure any vents or soffits are covered by wire mesh to prevent embers from sneaking in. They all sound like little things but they can make a big difference.”

For more information about safe burning in Alaska, go to <http://forestry.alaska.gov/burn>

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STATE OF ALASKA



Executive Proclamation by Governor Mike Dunleavy

WHEREAS, Alaska's vast expanses of wildlands serve as habitat for fish and wildlife, provide abundant recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, are home to extensive timber resources, and enrich our Alaskan lifestyle; and

WHEREAS, wildland fires are a natural and inevitable part of the ecosystem and are vital to the maintenance of forest health; they are also unpredictable and can spread at a swift pace, endangering lives and property; and

WHEREAS, Alaska's wildland fire management agencies share the common goals of promoting personal safety and reducing loss of life, while preserving and enhancing the health of forests and wetlands; and

WHEREAS, in addition to naturally occurring wildfires, fires caused by people happen every year, and they typically pose more of a threat to residents, firefighters, and property. Wildland fires pose a serious public safety concern, so Alaskans must use precaution, practice prevention, and be prepared to protect the communities that are surrounded by, and intermingled with, undeveloped lands; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, the trend has been for earlier and longer fire seasons. In 2020, 181,253 acres were burned, making public awareness of wildland fire prevention practices and preparedness measures crucial for public safety; and

WHEREAS, communities and individuals must be proactive in both preventing and preparing for wildfires.

NOW THEREFORE, I, Mike Dunleavy, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF ALASKA, do hereby proclaim May 9-15, 2021 as:

Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week

in Alaska, and encourage all Alaskans to recognize the importance of wildfires to the Alaskan landscape, be aware of their potential for damage, and commit to educating themselves on how to reduce the threat of wildland fires to our homes, property, and community.

Dated: May 9, 2021



A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mike Dunleavy".

*Mike Dunleavy, Governor
who has also authorized the
seal of the State of Alaska to
be affixed to this proclamation.*