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Commissioner



Department of
Natural Resources

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STATE OF ALASKA

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release: May 6, 2022

Governor Mike Dunleavy declares May 8-14 as Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week in Alaska

(FAIRBANKS, AK) – The days are growing longer, day-time temperatures are heating up, and we have had several nights that the temperatures remained above freezing.

To help raise awareness, Governor Mike Dunleavy has proclaimed May 8-14 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.

“Wildland fires are a natural and inevitable part of the ecosystem and are vital to the maintenance of forest health,” said Governor Dunleavy. “They are also unpredictable and can spread at a swift pace, endangering lives and property. 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 serious public safety concerns, so Alaskans must use precaution practice prevention and be prepared to protect the communities that are surrounded by and intermingled with undeveloped lands.”

The governor reminds Alaskans the Division of Forestry’s name will be changed on July 1, 2022, to the Division of Forestry and Fire Protection to better reflect the critical public safety and fire suppression responsibilities of the division.

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. Of the 47 fires reported so far this season, 42 have been determined to be 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% 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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ATTENTION EDITORS: A press availability is scheduled for Tuesday, May 10, 9 am until noon at the Mat-Su Area Forestry offices, 101 S. Airport Rd, Palmer, Alaska. DOF State Forester and Director Helge Eng, DOF State Forester and Chief of Fire and Aviation Norm McDonald, and DOF Mat-Su area Fire Management Officer Phil Blydenburg will be available. More officials may be added to this list.

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