

Corri A. Feige
Commissioner



Department of
Natural Resources

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STATE OF ALASKA

MEDIA ADVISORY

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New law makes it easier to hire, train local firefighters

(Fairbanks, AK) – Governor Mike Dunleavy signed House Bill 209 “An Act relating to emergency firefighters” yesterday in Fairbanks that will help build the State’s mostly rural-based firefighting crews, strengthen local economies, and provide enhanced public safety to Alaska communities.

“This important change lets the State put local fire crews to work more consistently and grow our rural firefighting capabilities,” **said Governor Mike Dunleavy**. “And with more flexibility to prevent wildland fires through fuels reduction projects, not just fight active fires, it’s another tool in our toolkit to keep Alaskans, their homes, and our State’s critical infrastructure safe.”

The new law amends current statute AS 41.15.030(b) and will allow the Department of Natural Resources to use general fund appropriations to pay emergency firefighting personnel to perform non-emergency hazardous fuels reduction work. This simple yet important change will help the Division of Forestry retain the firefighters they train and deploy during the summer fire season, using them for non-fire programs like fuels mitigation outside of the normal fire season.

As compared to importing expensive crews from the outside, Alaska-based firefighting crews who are trained in tactics that are effective for Alaska fuels and conditions are more effective at prevention and suppression. Response times are greatly reduced to aggressively attack and address dangerous wildfires, ensuring a smaller overall fire footprint. Fuels reduction costs are also reduced by having a local team of trained professionals.

The bill, sponsored by Representative Mike Cronk of Tok, passed unanimously in the House of Representatives during the most recent Legislative session.

“This is a huge step in reestablishing our state-based emergency firefighting crews from rural Alaska,” **said Representative Mike Cronk**. “As a former EFF myself, I know the important role that our village crews played in fighting fires across Alaska and the Lower 48. This bill will allow us to rebuild our village EFF crews, provide for consistent employment during the fire season, and will bring back a sense of pride to our people. This is a win/win for all of Alaska.”

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CONTACT: Lorraine Henry lorraine.henry@alaska.gov 907-269-8427