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Rain prompts state to reverse some precautionary fire closures

(Palmer, AK) – Recent rain in areas experiencing high fire danger have prompted state land managers to reverse earlier closure of a popular Mat-Su shooting range, and to end a ban on campfires in some Southcentral state parks.

The Kenny and Patti Barber Shooting Range will reopen Thursday at 10 a.m. and resume regular operating hours, now that rain has reduced the chance firearms might ignite a wildfire in the Knik River Public Use Area. Located at mile 2.7 of the Maud Road extension, it is open to the public at no charge from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., and closed on Wednesdays for maintenance.

Unusually hot, dry weather in the area, combined with the severe demands on state firefighting resources in fires in the state prompted the Division of Mining, Land and Water to close the range on Aug. 22 as a precaution.

“The recent rain has taken some of the edge off the risk of fire in this area, so we felt it was reasonable to reopen this range and give hunters the chance to get ready for hunting season,” said Clark Cox, Southcentral Regional Manager for the Division of Mining, Land and Water.

Campfires will also again be allowed in state parks and campgrounds in the Kenai Peninsula and Matanuska-Susitna boroughs, as well as in the Chugach State Park, effective today, said Matt Wedeking, operations manager for Alaska State Parks. Campfires had been suspended on Aug. 20, also out of concerns campers might ignite fires at time when firefighting resources were stretched thin around the state.

While the risk of fire is somewhat diminished thanks to the rain, the chance of new fires igniting and the consequences of fire remain very serious. Both officials warned residents or visitors using campgrounds or the shooting range to be cautious, alert, and ready to report any fires to public safety officials immediately.

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