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Department of
Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: September 10, 2019

Willow Swamp reopened for hunting, Nancy Lake area for camping

(Palmer, AK) – With the Deshka Landing Fire near Willow now at 95 percent containment and firefighters no longer working in the area, a hunting and public access closure to a portion of Game Management Unit 14A in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is being rescinded. The Willow Swamp area will again be open to the public effective at 8 a.m. on Wednesday.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Alaska Division of Forestry closed the area to hunting and public access on Aug. 23 due to increased fire risk, as well as firefighter and public safety concerns related to the Deshka Landing Fire, which started on August 17 and burned an estimated 1,318 acres. The Willow Swamp area is located in the middle of the burn area.

With containment objectives being met, the fire is in monitor status and firefighters are no longer working in the area. Hunters and recreationalists, however, need to be aware that hazards remain, and are encouraged to avoid the burn area. Extreme caution should be used by anyone accessing the burn area.

Fire-weakened trees, also called snags, pose a risk of falling even without a wind. While firefighters cut and removed hundreds of hazard trees during the past three weeks for firefighter and public safety, some fire-weakened trees remain in the area. Ash pits are another danger that can pose a significant risk to the public. Ash pits are deep pockets of burning organic material that are difficult to identify and continue to hold heat. Several firefighters on both the Deshka Landing Fire and nearby McKinley Fire north of Willow suffered burns as a result of stepping or falling into ash pits. People moving through the fire area should advance slowly and use a stick or pole to probe for ash pits in their path.

In addition, Alaska State Parks is reopening the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area east of the fire area, with the exception of the South Rolly Lake Campground, which remains closed to all recreational use due to hazard trees. The Red Shirt Lake Trail and the Red Shirt Public Use Cabins are again open to the public for use. The trail is passable, but it is extremely important that those going through the burned areas stay on the trail to avoid ash pits. The fire and subsequent suppression efforts have deteriorated some sections of trail.

The specific area being reopened is defined as:

Unit 14(A), that portion north of 61.671297, -150.303068 (Decimal Degree System) on the east bank of the Susitna River directly east to the western boundary of the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area, west of the western boundary of the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area to the western shoreline of Big Darrell Lake, then to and along the western shoreline of Vera Lake to Deshka Landing Road, south of the South side of Deshka Landing road from Vera Lake, continuing around the south side of the developed Deshka Landing properties and west to the Susitna River, and east of the east bank of the Susitna River to waypoint 61.671297, -150.303068 (Decimal Degree System) on the east bank of the Susitna River.

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