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Commissioner



Department of
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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Rain brings end to burn suspension, except on Kenai Peninsula

(Anchorage, AK) – With widespread weekend rain reducing wildfire danger across much of the state, the Alaska Division of Forestry is rescinding its near-statewide burn permit suspension everywhere except on the Kenai Peninsula, effective at 10 a.m. today.

The burn suspension will remain in effect on state, private and municipal lands on the Kenai Peninsula throughout June, prohibiting burning of brush piles or lawns, or the use of burn barrels, to reduce the risk and number of human-caused wildfires.

The division suspended permitted burning for the entire state except in Southeast Alaska on May 1, when travel restrictions and quarantine requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic led wildland fire managers to doubt whether they could rely as usual on importing firefighting personnel from the Lower 48 to help fight Alaska wildfires.

The division has since worked with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) to develop a plan for how to safely transport firefighting personnel from other states to Alaska should the need arise, said Alaska Division of Forestry Wildland Fire and Aviation Program Manager Norm McDonald.

“Working with DHSS, we now have a system in place that increases the likelihood of getting assistance from the Lower 48,” said McDonald. “That, combined with the rain that fell over the weekend, prompted us to re-evaluate the current need for a burn permit suspension.”

The state was at high risk of wildfires due to extremely dry conditions in the first three weeks of May, before widespread Memorial Day weekend rains helped lower the risk in much of the state. State fire manager on the Kenai Peninsula elected to keep the burn permit suspension in place due to a predicted increase in recreational traffic associated with salmon fishing season, he said.

“We’re not out of the woods yet,” said McDonald, adding that people still need to follow the safe burning guidelines on their burn permits in areas where the suspension is being

lifted. “Warmer, drier weather is expected to develop over most of the state later this week and it won’t take long for fire danger to elevate, given how dry conditions were previously.”

The division will continually evaluate conditions in specific areas to determine whether it is appropriate to allow fires, and will notify the public of any changes in its policies allowing or prohibiting burning.

Residents seeking to burn must call their local forestry office or check the Division of Forestry’s burn permit website at www.dnr.alaska.gov/burn to make sure burning is allowed in their area on the day they want to burn. The website also has information about safe burning practices residents should follow to reduce the chances of starting a wildfire.

So far this season, the state forestry division has responded to 76 wildfires in state fire protection areas that have burned approximately 230 acres. That compares to 85 fires that had burned approximately 3,404 acres last year.

“We at the Division of Forestry want to thank members of the public for being patient, and for following the rules suspending burn permits in the last month,” McDonald said. “Staying vigilant and following some common-sense fire safety rules will go a long way toward helping us all have a safer, healthier, and more enjoyable summer in Alaska’s outdoors.”

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