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PRESS RELEASE

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State forestry to discuss Haystack fire breaks at Feb. 14 meeting

DOF proposing 16 miles of fire breaks to protect homes north of Fairbanks

(Fairbanks, AK) – The Alaska Division of Forestry’s Fairbanks Area office is holding a public meeting on Monday, February 14 in Fox to talk about two fire breaks the agency is proposing to protect homes in the Haystack Mountain area north of Fairbanks. The meeting will be held at the Fox Lions Community Center, 2285 Steese Highway, beginning at 6 p.m.

The two fire breaks, part of the Haystack Mountain Fuels Mitigation Project, are located along Washington Creek and Leuthold Drive, approximately 20 miles north of Fairbanks. The two fuel breaks would help protect more than 200 homes in multiple subdivisions.

The project would widen pre-existing control lines and establish new treatment units along Washington Creek and Leuthold Drive. Based on fuels, topography, and community impact, a variety of treatment methods are being considered. The Washington Creek fuel break would start at approximately Mile 16 Elliott Highway and extend north and east for approximately 14 miles. The Leuthold Drive fire break would parallel the north side of the road for about 2 miles.

“The planned fuel breaks would enhance public safety by providing firefighters with tactical alternatives to suppress fast-moving wildfires and create a more mosaic and fire-resistant landscape,” Fire Management Officer Gordon Amundson with Fairbanks Area Forestry said. “Once completed, the fuel breaks will offer fire resistance barriers that can also serve as control lines during wildland fire suppression efforts and provide a safer working environment for firefighters.”

The Haystack Mountain area has been threatened by multiple major wildfires in recent years, most recently last summer by the Haystack Fire that burned 927 acres and prompted evacuation alerts for more than 200 homeowners. Other fires that have posed a threat include the 2004 Boundary Fire and the 2015 Aggie Creek Fire.

Those kind of wildland-urban interface fires are precisely the kind of fires the Division of Forestry wants to prevent, Amundson said. Because of their close proximity to communities, wildland-urban interface fires are the most complex, costly, and dangerous situations firefighters and the public can face.

“This is a proactive approach to address what has been a long-standing concern for both homeowners and fire managers,” Amundson said.

The proposed Haystack fire breaks are an extension of a comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that was completed in 2005 to assess high-risk fire areas in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. The Haystack Mountain area is identified in the CWPP as a ‘High’ to ‘Extreme’ fire risk “Zone of Concern” due to topography and a dense and continuous black spruce landscape. As part of its wildland fire protection mandate and an increased emphasis on hazardous fuels reduction, the DOF is working to expand the existing network of fuel treatment projects to reduce the threat of fires impacting communities like Haystack.

The project is expected to take four to five years. Additionally, the removal of black spruce and regrowth of birch and aspen will enhance moose habitat and offer expanded backcountry recreational opportunities.

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