

State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources



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2016 Alaska fire season numbers well below normal

(Fairbanks, AK) - Despite an early start to Alaska's 2016 wildfire season, the number of acres burned this summer ended up well below normal levels.

A total of 558 wildfires burned 500,095 acres in Alaska this summer, making it the 36th largest fire season on record dating back to 1939, according to statistics from the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center in Fairbanks. During an average Alaska fire season, there are about 500 fires and approximately 1 million acres are burned.

While Alaska's fire season got off to an early start, heavy rainfall in the Interior in June and July slowed fire activity during what are typically the two of the busiest months of the fire season. In terms of acres burned, 2016 didn't compare to 2015, when 768 fires burned more than 5.1 million acres in Alaska, making it the second-largest fire season on record in the Last Frontier.

Despite the below-average fire season, Alaska still ranked No. 2 behind California in total acres burned by state. As of Sept. 30, approximately 640,000 acres had burned in California this summer. Nationwide, approximately 4.9 million acres have burned thus far this summer, which is less than half of the record-setting 10 million acres that burned in 2015.

As is usually the case, the majority of wildfires in Alaska in 2016 were human caused. Fifty-nine percent of wildfires (331) were caused by humans and 41 percent (227) were started by lightning.

There were 359 fires in the Alaska Division of Forestry's protection area; 180 fires in the Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service's protection area; and 19 fires on U.S. Forest Service land. As of September 30, there were still 20 fires listed as active in Alaska.

Here some of the more interesting statistics from the 2016 fire season.

- The first wildfire of the season was reported on Feb. 22 near Delta Junction as the result of live-fire training on military land. The fire was estimated at 1 acre. In the last 10 years, only 2011 had a wildfire reported that early.
- There were 66 fires reported in April, all of which were human caused. That's the most fires reported in April in the last 10 years.
- A load of BLM AFS smokejumpers was deployed to the Leaf Lake Fire along the Knik River near Palmer on April 17. It was the earliest smokejumper deployment in the 57-year history of the Alaska Smokejumpers.
- The largest fire of the season was the 58,565-acre Hog River Fire.
- There were 26 "holdover" fires reported from fires that burned in 2015, most of which (14) came from the Card Street Fire on the Kenai Peninsula.
- There were 111 fire starts reported from July 14-16 as a result of lightning strikes, which accounted for 20 percent of the total fires in 2016.
- Seventeen Lower 48 states were represented in the overhead personnel brought to Alaska.
- The number of lightning strikes recorded in 2016 – approximately 200,000 – was roughly the same number recorded in 2015, but wetter conditions in June and July kept the number of starts much lower than last year.
- The wet conditions in June and July enabled Alaska's wildfire protection agencies to send more than 400 personnel to the Lower 48 to assist with suppression efforts in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

For more information on the 2016 Alaska fire season, go to the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center website at <http://fire.ak.blm.gov> or www.akfireinfo.com.

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