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Department of
Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: May 11, 2020

Governor Dunleavy urges Alaskans to prepare for, prevent wildfires

(Fairbanks, AK) – With the state’s second-worst wildland fire season looming large in Alaskans’ memories, Governor Mike Dunleavy has proclaimed Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week (May 10-16) to help reduce the risk of a replay this summer.

The governor, along with fire managers with the Alaska Division of Forestry, is urging Alaskans to take personal responsibility for helping prevent human-caused wildfires this summer, lest we experience a repeat of fires that consumed nearly 2.6 million acres of land, and destroyed almost 60 homes last year.

“As we witnessed last year and in previous years, wildfires pose a dangerous and costly threat to communities, infrastructure and natural resources in Alaska,” Governor Dunleavy said. “Mother Nature starts enough wildfires in Alaska each summer with lightning; she doesn’t need any help from us.”

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is adding an extra layer of uncertainty for this wildland firefighting season. Alaska has historically relied heavily on assistance from Lower 48 firefighting personnel to help contain wildfires, importing more than 5,000 last year. But the ongoing health crisis has brought travel restrictions and quarantine requirements that will likely reduce the amount of resources available from the Lower 48.

Those concerns prompted the Division of Forestry to impose a burn permit suspension for much of the state (excluding Southeast Alaska) on May 1, to reduce the risk of human-caused fires. The governor urged Alaskans to adhere to the burn permit suspension, which prohibits the use of burn barrels, open debris burning and lawn burning.

“As Alaskans, we need to do everything we can to protect our great state and that means preventing human-caused wildfires,” Dunleavy said.

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Over the last 20 years, more than 60 percent of wildfires in Alaska have been human caused. Those fires are the most dangerous because they tend to be close to urban areas where most residents live and recreate.

Already this season, firefighters from the Alaska Division of Forestry have responded to more than 50 human-caused fires, most of them in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley and on the Kenai Peninsula.

The current “pre-greenup” conditions are among the most dangerous of the year for wildfire ignition, as dead, dry grass exposed by melting snow can easily be ignited by even the smallest spark or flame, and grow quickly into a wildfire.

With hotter, drier days to come, Alaskans need to be careful with any activity that might ignite a wildfire. It’s important to remember that those who light fires are responsible for them, and can be held responsible if that fire escapes due to negligence.

For more information about safe burning in Alaska, go to <http://forestry.alaska.gov/burn>

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STATE OF ALASKA



Executive Proclamation by Governor Mike Dunleavy

WHEREAS, Alaska's breathtaking wildlands serve as habitat for fish and wildlife, provide abundant recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, are home to vast timber resources, and enrich our Alaskan lifestyle; and

WHEREAS, wildland fires are a natural and inevitable part of the ecosystem and are crucial to the maintenance of forest health; they are also unpredictable and can spread at a swift pace, endangering lives and property; and

WHEREAS, Alaska's wildland fire management agencies share the common goals of promoting personal safety and reducing loss of life, while preserving and enhancing the health of forests and wetlands; and

WHEREAS, naturally caused wildland fires are part of a healthy ecosystem, fires caused by people occur every year, and they typically pose more of a threat to residents, firefighters, and property. Wildland fires pose a serious public safety concern, so Alaskans must use precaution, practice prevention, and be prepared to protect the communities that are surrounded by, and intermingled with, undeveloped lands; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, the trend has been for earlier and longer fire seasons due to the changing climate. On average more than one million acres burn from wildfires in Alaska each year, making public awareness of wildland fire prevention practices and preparedness measures crucial for public safety; and

WHEREAS, given the potential impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic could have on wildland firefighting resources and the response to, and management of, wildfires in Alaska during the 2020 fire season, making it more important than ever to reduce human-caused fires; and

WHEREAS, communities and individuals must be proactive in both preventing and preparing for wildfires.


NOW THEREFORE, I, Mike Dunleavy, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF ALASKA, do hereby proclaim May 10-16, 2020 as:

Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week

in Alaska, and encourage all Alaskans to recognize the importance of wildfires to the Alaskan landscape, be aware of their potential for damage, and commit to educating themselves on how to reduce the threat of wildland fires to our homes, property, and community.

Dated: May 10, 2020




Mike Dunleavy, Governor
who has also authorized the
seal of the State of Alaska to
be affixed to this proclamation.