

## 2021 Alaska Region Wildfire Summary

### A Below-Average Fire Year

Statewide, 389 wildfires burned 254,500 acres across all jurisdictions. Of these, 20 fires were on National Forest System (NFS) lands; four fires burned a negligible number of acres in the Chugach National Forest, and 16 fires burned a total of seven acres in the Tongass National Forest. This fell below the 10-year annual average for fire activity on Alaska's two national forests. In May, there was an uptick in fire activity across the state, with June being the most active fire month.

National Forest	Acres Burned	Number of Fires	10-Year Average Annual Acres Burned
Chugach	Less than 1	4	79
Tongass	7	16	10



Photo: A visitor to the McKinley Trail Cabin on the Chugach National Forest attempts to enjoy a campfire in the rain. Typical temperate rainforest climate and users following proper campfire safety, helped keep 2021 wildfire activity low in Alaska's national forests. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service.

### Supporting the Lower 48

Even a relatively quiet fire season in Alaska can quickly expend state resources, especially when resources are in short supply nationwide. Fortunately, Alaska fire danger subsided significantly in July, as it does in most years with the onset of wet weather. This allowed fire managers to reduce resources committed to Alaskan wildfires, pivoting to support to the rest of the country. Several Alaska-based crews, including Forest Service crews, were sent south from July to September. The Alaska Interagency Type 1 Incident Management Team participated in three deployments to the lower 48.



Photo: Pioneer Peak Interagency Hotshot Crew boards a jet for Boise, Idaho, from the National Interagency Coordination Center at Ted Stevens International Airport on July 20. Photo credit: Kale Casey/Alaska Interagency Type 1 Incident Management Team.

### Raising Awareness

Governor Mike Dunleavy proclaimed May 9 to May 15, "Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week in Alaska," urging Alaskans to take steps to protect their homes and communities during the summer. The gubernatorial message encouraged residents to recognize the importance of wildfires to the Alaskan landscape while educating themselves to prevent human-caused wildfires.

## Pandemic Still a Threat

COVID-19 mitigation measures helped contain the spread of the virus, but several fire crews and incident management team members were infected during the 2021 fire season. Additionally, some Alaska Region staff supported the vaccination roll-out in their local communities and outside of Alaska.



Photo: Tom Heutte, Tongass Geographic Information System (GIS) Program Manager, checked in patients at Ketchikan Emergency Operations Center and the Ketchikan Public Health Center public vaccine clinic. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service.

## Spruce Beetle Mitigation

The Chugach National Forest conducted spruce beetle mitigation beginning in October. The various efforts, concentrated at five high-use campgrounds, included removing dead and dying trees to reduce the risk of falling hazard trees and wildfire.



Photo: Pile burning of spruce beetle-killed trees at Quartz Creek Campground in the Chugach National Forest. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service.

## Recruiting Non-Fire Personnel

The USDA Forest Service Alaska Region took advantage of the calmer fire year by seizing the opportunity to educate its non-fire personnel on how to join the fire militia. The agency's "How to Get Involved in Wildland Fire Support" webinar took place virtually in November with great success, drawing significant attendance regionwide. The event provided participants with valuable information on how to earn their "red card" certification for wildland fire support. Staff also learned how to earn qualifications in their professional fields of interest to support future incident management teams fighting wildfires locally and outside of Alaska.



Photo: A burn operation conducted by firefighters on June 25 to protect a Native allotment from the Dry Creek Fire south of Manley Hot Springs. Photo credit: Cammy Roy, Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Fire Service.

## Greater Regional Context

The largest fires in Alaska in 2021 were the Munson Creek Fire (54,050 acres) on Alaska Department of Natural Resources land and the Dry Creek Fire (50,745 acres) on Bureau of Land Management lands. Both fires started by lightning and were declared contained by mid-July.