

Alaska Region | October 2023

2023 Alaska Region Wildfire Summary

No Large Fires on Forest Service Land

Nine small fires burned only ten of the 28.3 million acres under Forest Service wildfire management. The Chugach National Forest had three fires near Kenai Lake totaling less than one acre and the Tongass National Forest had six fires, three in Juneau, two in Haines and one on Prince of Wales Island totaling ten acres. Light wildfire activity is typical here as much of the landscape includes temperate rainforest, rock and ice.



Photo: Jack Liesch boards his boat pickup after working on the Taiya Point Fire near Haines, Alaska. Liesch arrived at the fire via floatplane days prior. USDA Forest Service photo.

Coordinated Support Inside & Out

The light wildfire season on the forests provided the opportunity for resources to support others. Staff on the Chugach and Tongass worked together to send their combined resources to wildfires burning in interior Alaska, Canada and the Lower 48 as well as to support prescribed burn operations elsewhere. Examples of this support included sending three suppression modules (which involved interagency staff) to incidents in interior Alaska, dispatching a Region 10 crew to California and Canada, and mobilizing personnel to prescribed burns in Oregon and Georgia.



Photo: Firefighters Liana McClintock (left) and Alex Apelis (middle) get ready to take a helicopter flight to the Mosquito Creek Fire in interior Alaska outside of Salcha. USDA Forest Service photo.



Photo: Alaska Fire personnel tend to a prescribed burn outside of Bend, Oregon. The Forest Service's Alaska and Pacific Northwest Regions are managed by one fire organization and regularly share resources. USDA Forest Service photo.

Logistically Interesting

Alaska's fire personnel traveled near and far in a variety of less than ordinary transportation methods. Boats, float planes, helicopters, cargo planes and more were used to transport staff to remote locations and deliver essential supplies.



Photo: Firefighters recovering fresh food delivered by cargo plane to the Standard Creek Fire in interior Alaska. USDA Forest Service photo.

Prevention & Preparedness

“Work is ongoing with other federal, state, tribal and local agencies to create fuel breaks that reduce flammable vegetation and enable firefighters to work more safely near communities when fires occur. Efforts to help homeowners adopt Firewise guidelines and be smoke ready also helps our communities, especially faced with Alaska’s changing climate. Fuel reduction through burning piles, as was recently conducted on the Chugach National Forest, also helps. Fire can be a very effective and safe tool to use as long as we follow the safety precautions.” – Alex Robertson, Director of Fire, Fuels & Aviation, Pacific Northwest & Alaska Regions.



Photo: Fire leadership at the fall After Action Review in Sitka, Alaska. USDA Forest Service photo.

Prescribed Fire on the Chugach

Forest staff, assisted by wildland firefighters from Chugachmiut, an Alaska Native nonprofit serving the seven Native tribes in the Chugach Region, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service planned 250 acres of prescribed pile burning across all districts this fall and winter. The goals are to reduce hazardous fuels within the forest as part of

ongoing spruce beetle damage mitigation and to improve wildlife habitat. Reducing hazardous fuels decreases wildfire potential and lessens the severity of fires should they occur.



Photo: Prescribed pile burning on the Chugach National Forest near Hope, Alaska on Sept. 13, 2023. Chugach staff worked together with the Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Protection on this burn. USDA Forest Service photo by Zach Freiwald.

Big Picture: Regional Context

The state recorded a year of low wildfire activity with 342 wildfires burning 295,767 acres. Fire season started slowly with less than 2,000 acres burned in the state before July 15. The cause of the numbers of wildfires in the state was almost an even split between human and natural causes; however, 99% of the acres burned were from natural ignitions.



Photo: Firefighters hike out of the Standard Creek Fire, outside of Fairbanks, Alaska after combating the fire for over two weeks. The fire was initially fought by the Alaska Smokejumpers. USDA Forest Service photo.