



Alaska Fire Service

The Alaska Fire Service provides: wildland fire suppression services for all DOI and Native Corporation lands in Alaska and assists those entities with other fire management activities; guidance and interpretation of fire policy for BLM Alaska; leadership and management of the BLM Alaska aviation program.

Introduction

The BLM Alaska Fire Service (BLM AFS) was created in 1982 and tasked in the Department of the Interior Manual to provide fire suppression services for all Department of the Interior agencies and lands conveyed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

The BLM AFS leads the BLM Alaska's statewide Fire and Aviation program, and is responsible for providing fuels management direction, conducting and supporting fire ecology research, and assisting with fire planning and policy interpretation.

The BLM AFS manages the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC); maintains a National Incident Support Cache with over \$16 million in inventory; provides logistical and operational support to agencies, incident management teams and individual firefighters; operates and maintains advanced communication and computer systems; oversees initial and extended attack fire-related resources; and distributes wildland fire information to the public and news media during the fire season.

Personnel and Resources

The BLM AFS employs approximately 400 people with a staff that includes 73 smokejumpers, 36 fire specialists, two Interagency Hotshot crews and a Type 2 crew. The BLM AFS also provides training and employment for approximately 26 Emergency Firefighter (EFF) crews from 32 Alaska villages. The money earned by EFF firefighters is a significant income source for many villages.

The firefighting resources the BLM AFS routinely has available are four Fire Boss water scooping aircraft, seven helicopters, four airplanes for smokejumpers, and six utility aircraft. These resources are supplemented as needed by locally hired aircraft and aircraft from the Lower 48 and Canada.

Interagency

The BLM AFS operates on an interagency basis with employees from the DOI, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and State of Alaska all integral to the overall function of the AFS. Interagency planning, coordination, and sharing of resources occur on a daily basis, coordinated by the AICC. The strengths and resources of each agency complement each other.

Two negotiated agreements define roles, responsibilities and expectations; facilitate the exchange of resources and funding between the cooperating agencies; and provide a mechanism to implement the direction in departmental manuals.

Alaska is divided into three wildland fire protection areas to maximize the efficient use of fire-related resources. The BLM AFS, Alaska Division of Forestry, and USFS respond to wildland fires within their respective protection areas regardless of jurisdictional agency.

Fire Management Plan

Initial-attack priorities and responses are determined by the management options defined in the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan 2016 and

designated by each jurisdictional agency based on its mission, mandates and policies. The goals and objectives for wildland fire management, extended operations, general suppression guidelines and constraints, and program review requirements are also addressed in the plan.

The BLM AFS ensures suppression services are provided on:

- 72 million acres - BLM-administered surface lands
- 52.1 million acres - National Park Service lands
- 76.5 million acres - U.S. Fish and Wildlife lands
- 43.5 million acres - Alaska Native Corporation lands
- 1.6 million acres - Military withdrawn public land under an Interagency Service Agreement with the U.S. Army-Alaska
- 14,421 - Alaska Native allotments for which the Bureau of Indian Affairs has fire management responsibility (non-contiguous parcels 160 acres or less)

Summary

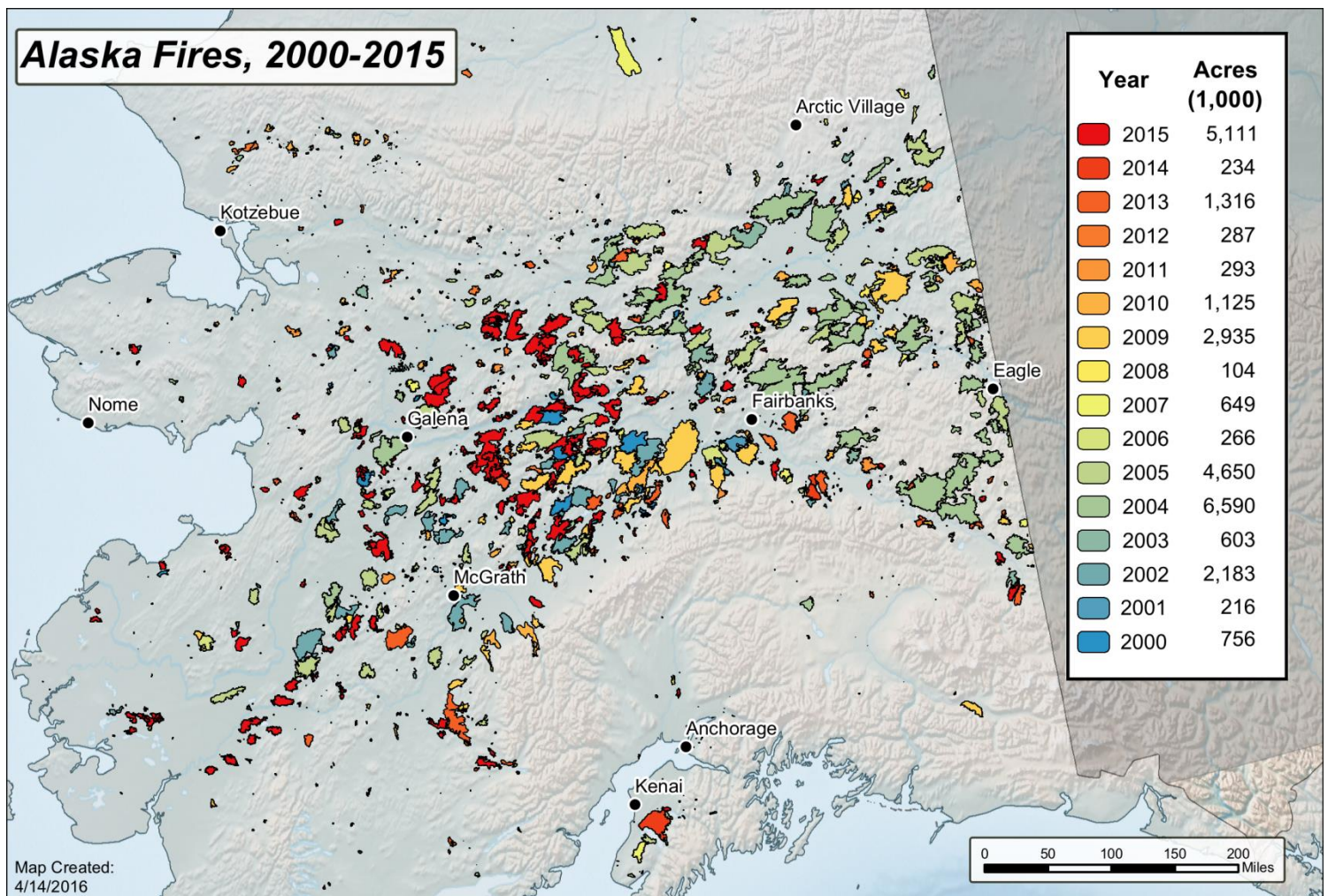
The BLM AFS is a model organization that effectively and economically provides wildland fire suppression services for federal and state agencies and Native entities in Alaska. With its trained staff and equipment cache, it also serves as a vital national resource for fire, natural disasters and other emergencies throughout Alaska and the United States.

2000-2015

The Alaska boreal forest ecosystem depends on fire to maintain its viability. Resource and fire managers consistently weigh the long range effects of fire suppression on ecosystem sustainability with the response necessary to address immediate concerns, threats to communities and public health issues.

Coordinated planning efforts to maintain a consistent, cost-effective interagency approach to wildland fire management are directed by the The Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan. Values at risk, ecological considerations, and suppression costs designate fire management option areas and priorities. The standard responses to a fire within an option area range from aggressive suppression to surveillance, and

provide an opportunity for agencies to achieve both protection and natural resource management goals and objectives. Non-standard responses are initiated when the situation warrants. The number of acres burned varies annually with three record, or near record, for total acreage seasons falling within the past 15 years – 2004 (1st), 2005 (5th), and 2015 (2nd).



The Next 10 Years

Global climate models demonstrate the effects of climate warming will occur first and most dramatically at high latitudes. Climate warming is causing the growing season to increase in length in Alaska; resulting in drought stress, persistent bark beetle and other forest pathogen activity; and fires burning deeper in the duff and later in the summer. Deep duff burning

favors reestablishment of hardwood rather than conifer dominated forests. Since deciduous species tend to be less flammable than spruce forest during lightning season, changes in forest composition may help offset some of the projected increase in wildfire. Some models predict annual area burned to double over the next few decades in Interior Alaska and western Canada. In spite of the predicted shift in vegetation,

simulations indicate there will be more frequent fires burning, resulting in an overall increase in area burned annually. A new fire regime is also emerging in arctic tundra north of the Brooks Range – where large fires have been virtually absent for thousands of years – likely a result of shrinking sea ice, warmer summers, and more lightning.