



Upper Yukon Zone Fire Update

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chalkyitsik Fuels Build-up Index hits record high

Rainfall across Alaska continues to avoid the Upper Yukon zone, with conditions at extreme levels predicted to drive fire activity across the Yukon flats. The Buildup Index (BUI) is the best indicator of seasonal severity and overall flammability in the boreal forest here in Alaska, representing deeper drying in the duff layers and greater fuel availability. Previously, the record BUI for the Chalkyitsik monitoring station was 254 but is forecast to hit 283, indicative of extreme fire conditions on the landscape. Multiple rain events totaling more than an inch each over several days will be needed to moderate fire potential in the area.

The Upper Yukon Zone has 39 active fires which includes five new starts, and nine staffed fires. More than 7,000 lightning strikes were recorded statewide yesterday, with a large portion of strikes in the Upper Yukon area. Wind gusts are expected to hit the 20 mph range today and are projected to increase to 30 mph by the weekend. Weather and wind conditions greatly impact fire behavior, and the Yukon zone will continue to exhibit very active fire behavior.

Here is a summary of some of the more significant fires burning in the Yukon Flats and surrounding areas:

Chalkyitsik Complex – #466 (Tractor Trail 2 – #348, Frozen Calf Fire – #367, Bearnose Hill Fire – #407, and Tettjajik Creek #424) – 311,722 acres – 231 personnel are assigned to the complex

Wednesday was yet another day the Upper Yukon Flats was the hottest and driest area of the state. Temperatures in the area were again in the 80s but overall the fires of the Chalkyitsik Complex were not as active as the past several days. Most of the area was covered in smoke, shading the fire and not allowing it to gain energy from the sun for a more active burn. The Tettjajik Creek Fire (#424) was active on its southeast corner, spreading about two miles to the east. It was also moderately backing into the wind on the southwest corner. The southern flank on the west end of the Frozen Calf Fire (#367) was very active, but considerably less than earlier this week. The farthest northern point of that fire showed moderate growth toward the Porcupine River but remains a little more than five miles away from Herbert Village, on the north side of the Porcupine. The Bearnose Hill Fire (#407) was most active on the north flank where it burned through a thick stand of black spruce for approximately two miles toward the Draanjik River. It also showed limited backing and flanking on its other sides. The Tractor Trail 2 Fire (#348) was active again on the north and east flanks, but less so than previous days.

The village of Chalkyitsik, Chahalie Lake and cabin sites up the Draanjik River as far as Nelson Bluff are prepped and plumbed with sprinklers. Crews have also prepped Herbert Village on the Porcupine River. Firefighters are working on setting up point protection for a site on the Little Black River. Fire managers are looking up river beyond Nelson Bluff, assisted by high resolution imaging aircraft, to identify other areas that may need site protection should the east end of Frozen Calf Fire becomes active.

The indirect lines outside of Chalkyitsik have been established and plumbing is nearly finished. One of the lines extends south from the village to Ohtig Lake, and the other about six-miles to the northeast of the

village. Plans for strategic firing operations along both of these lines will remove thick areas of black spruce. Firing operations could commence late Thursday afternoon if weather conditions are favorable.

KZPA 900 AM radio in Fort Yukon is airing information updates about the Chalkyitsik Complex of fires daily at 12:50 pm.

A Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR) is in place over Chalkyitsik and some of the surrounding area to provide a safe operating environment for firefighting aircraft. Go to <https://tfr.faa.gov> for more information on the TFR.

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Hadweenzic River Fire (#337) – 49,636 acres, 64 personnel

Southwest winds yesterday continued to push the fire north and east across the Chandalar River onto the east side. Crews on the ground report it was mostly dry overnight, so fire behavior is expected to be active today. A Type 3 operations team will assume control of the east section of the Hadweenzic Fire this morning. The existing Type 3 team will remain with the west section of the Hadweenzic Fire and the Tony Slough Fire. Burn operations around prioritized areas will be completed today if weather and fire conditions allow. Currently nine boats are assigned to the combined fire operations, which assist with supply and crew movement as needed. Boats are vital to operations along the Yukon and Chandalar rivers and are more cost effective than helicopters. The Hadweenzic River Fire is burning approximately 6 1/2 miles northeast from Nahshii Bible Camp and approximately 19 miles west of Fort Yukon. A Temporary Flight Restriction has been placed over the Hadweenzic and Tony Slough fires. Go to <https://tfr.faa.gov> for more information on the TFR.

Tony Slough Fire (#493) – 1,526 acres, 54 personnel

Continued days of high temperatures pushed fire growth yesterday further north and east, and the Tony Slough Fire is now estimated at 4 miles from Camp Nahshii, a Bible Camp is located on the Yukon River between the Tony Slough and Hadweenzic Fires. Providing protection to structures and the village of Beaver remains the top priority. Burnout operations around allotments are planned today as crews work to protect structures. The fire is burning about 8 miles northeast of the village of Beaver. A Temporary Flight Restriction has been placed over the Hadweenzic and Tony Slough fires. Go to <https://tfr.faa.gov> for more information on the TFR.

Chandalar River Fire (#349) – 9,881 acres, 68 personnel

The Chandalar River Fire grew by about 700 acres yesterday. Southwest winds and damp fuel conditions prevented firefighters from conducting a planned firing operation. Southwest winds with gusts up to 23 mph are predicted for today as well, which would again put the firing operation on hold if the forecast holds true. The incident commander flew over the fire yesterday and reported that the northern edge was about three-quarters of a mile from one of the allotments on the south bank of the Chandalar River. Firefighters are monitoring the allotment and continue to reinforce the lines they've put in place to protect allotments in the area. The fire is still about 1 mile southwest of Venetie, with the Chandalar River serving as a natural barrier between the fire and the village.

East Fork Chandalar Fire (#572) – 20 acres, 36 personnel

The lightning-sparked East Fork Chandalar Fire is burning 25 miles northwest of Venetie. No increase in acreage was reported, despite active fire behavior yesterday. Water drops from helicopters and small scooper planes known as Fire Bosses helped crews on the ground. Firefighters have laid hoses around roughly 60 percent of the fire perimeter. As hoses are put in place around the edge of the fire, crews extinguish hotspots encountered. The general weather forecast for today calls for 8 to 12 mph winds out of the west to southwest, gusting to 23 mph, as a weak cold front moves into the area.

Crater Creek (#585) – 4 acres, 8 personnel

The Crater Creek was started by lightning Tuesday and is burning 10 miles northwest of Venetie. Eight smokejumpers are working this fire, supported by helicopters and Fire Boss water scoopers. The incident commander believes it will take “a couple days work” to put the fire out because the fuels are holding a lot of heat.

Multiple sources of information on smoke are located on the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center [Air Quality web page](#).

For more information, contact the Alaska Interagency Fire Information Office at (907) 356-5511 or email 2019.AFS.FIRES@gmail.com.

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