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Alaska pilots urged to observe TFRs, and not fly over wildfires

(Palmer, AK) – With aircraft playing an important part in fighting wildland fires in Alaska, state fire officials urged private pilots to keep their aircraft away from active fire areas and to respect airspace Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs).

While TFRs have been established in the airspace overlying the McKinley, Deshka and Swan Lake fires, there have been multiple incursions by private aircraft in the airspace over these fires in the past week, said Tim Mowry, spokesman for the state Division of Forestry.

“We understand the inconvenience these restrictions put on pilots but the safety of the public and firefighters is our number one priority,” Mowry said. “Incursions by private aircraft endanger the rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft used to drop water or fire retardant, to transport firefighting crews and equipment, or to provide aerial reconnaissance.”

TFRs are time-limited restrictions imposed on airspace for a variety of reasons, including protecting the safety of those working to fight wildfires or deal with other natural disasters. When TRFs are not in effect, private and commercial aircraft operations are subject to any normal airspace controls. The effective hours of the TFRs currently in place are:

- McKinley Fire: 10 a.m. - 11 p.m. AKDT (1800 - 0700 UTC)
- Deshka Fire: 10 a.m. - 11 p.m. AKDT (1800 - 0700 UTC)
- Swan Lake Fire: 8 a.m. - 10 p.m. AKDT (1600 - 0600 UTC)

Visual Flight Rules (VFR) aircraft are not permitted to fly through these TFRs unless landing at a published airstrip. Prior to entering the TFR, pilots must contact the designated agency identified in the applicable Notice to Airmen (NOTAM).

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