



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Alaska Fire Service

BLM Alaska 2023

The Bureau of Land Management Alaska Fire Service (BLM AFS) was created in 1982 to provide efficient and cost-effective fire suppression services for all U.S. Department of the Interior and Native lands (lands conveyed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971) in Alaska and assists those entities with other fire management activities. The BLM AFS implements these services within the framework of approved fire management plans and through agreements with the respective land managers or owners. The BLM AFS also provides fire and aviation policy guidance and interpretation for BLM Alaska.

The BLM AFS leads BLM's statewide fire and aviation programs, providing fuels management direction, conducting fire ecology research, and assisting with fire planning and policy interpretation. The BLM AFS also manages the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC) and maintains a National Incident Support Cache (with more than \$24 million in inventory). The BLM AFS provides logistical and operational support to agencies, incident management teams, and individual firefighters by operating and maintaining advanced communication and computer systems; overseeing initial and extended attack fire-related resources; and distributing wildland fire information to the public and news media during the fire season.

Leadership

- (Acting) Manager: Rob Berger, rberger@blm.gov, (907) 356-5505
- Associate Manager: Jake Dollard, jdollard@blm.gov, (907) 356-5506

BLM AFS employs approximately 350 BLM personnel during the fire season: 80 permanent-full time, 225 career seasonal; and 45 temporary.

Personnel and Resources

BLM AFS staff includes approximately 80 smokejumpers and 25 fire specialists, two Interagency Hotshot crews, and a Type 2 training crew with 20-25 firefighters per crew. The BLM AFS operates the only contract crew program in the BLM, with several 20-person Type 2 hand crews based in Alaska villages.

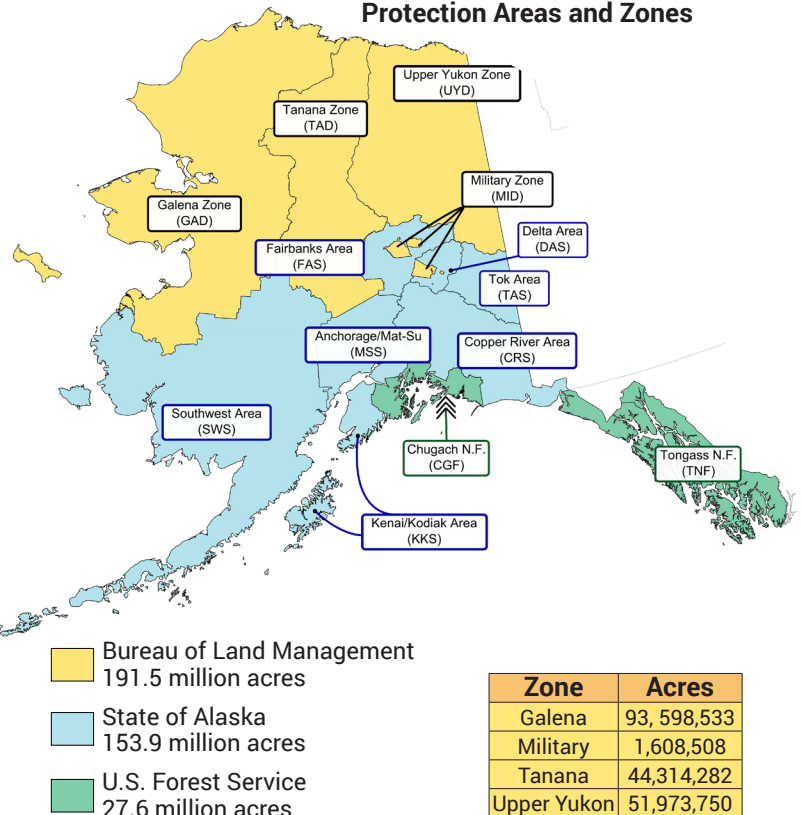
BLM AFS firefighting aviation resources include four Fire Boss water-scooping airplanes, seven helicopters, four smokejumper airplanes, five utility airplanes, two air attack airplanes used to coordinate the aerial suppression efforts, and 20 small unmanned aerial systems (drones). When needed, supplemental aircraft are hired locally or from the Lower 48 and Canada.

Interagency

The BLM AFS operates on an interagency basis, with staff from the Department of the Interior (DOI), U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and State of Alaska. The AICC coordinates daily interagency planning, coordination, and sharing of resources, with each agency's strengths and resources complementing each other. These interagency employees are vital to the BLM AFS mission.

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

Protection Areas and Zones



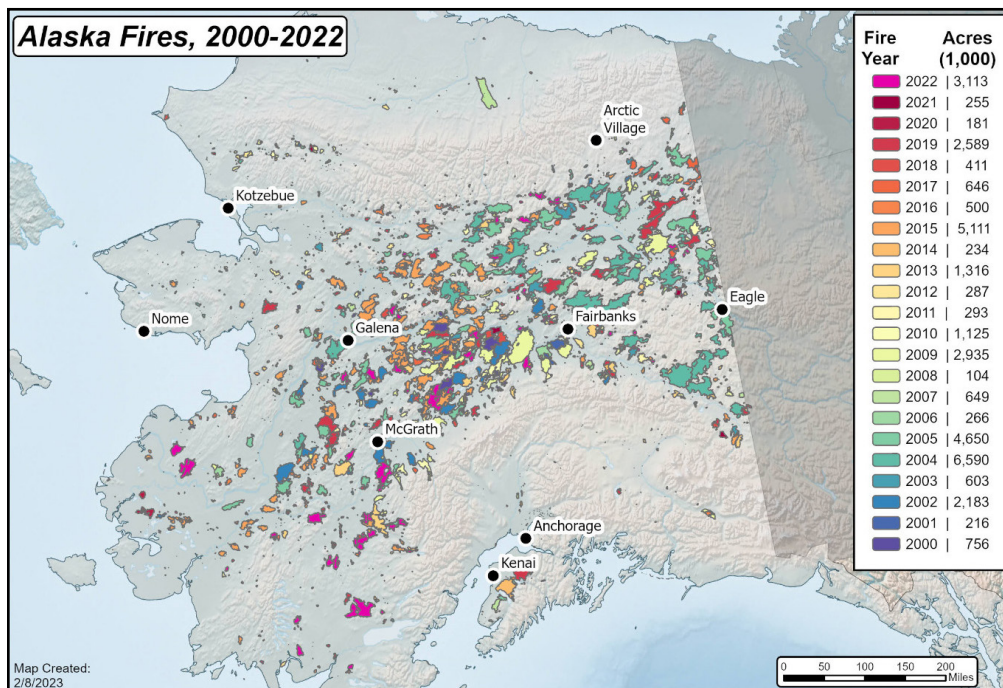
Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan

The Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan determines initial-attack priorities and responses, with each jurisdictional agency involved in these decisions based on their mission, mandates, and policies. The plan includes goals and objectives for wildland fire management, extended operations, general suppression guidelines and constraints, and program review requirements.

BLM AFS is authorized to provide fire suppression services for the following lands in Alaska:

- 1.6 million acres Army-managed (Public Law 106-65 and DOI Manual 620, Chapter 5)
- 71 million acres BLM-administered surface (DOI Manual 620, Chapter 5)
- 52 million acres National Park Service (DOI Manual 620, Chapter 5)
- 76 million acres U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (DOI Manual 620, Chapter 5)
- 43 million acres Alaska Native Corporation (4320 U.S.C. § 1620(e), DOI Manual 620, Chapter 5)
- 1.1 million acres incorporating approximately 14,500 individual Alaska Native allotments managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (non-contiguous parcels 160 acres or less) (DOI Manual 620, Chapter 5)

2000—2023 Wildland Fire Seasons



The Alaska Boreal Forest ecosystem depends on fire to maintain its viability. Resource and fire managers consistently weigh the long-term effects of fire suppression on ecosystem sustainability against the necessary response to address immediate concerns, threats to communities, and public health issues.

The Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan directs coordinated efforts to maintain a consistent, cost-effective interagency approach to wildland fire management. Values at risk, ecological considerations, and suppression costs designate fire management option areas and priorities. Standard wildfire responses range from aggressive

suppression to surveillance and empower agencies to achieve both protection and natural resource management objectives. Non-standard responses are initiated when the situation warrants. The number of acres burned varies annually (see map) with three record, or near record, total acreage seasons falling within the past 15 years: 2004 (1st), 2005 (5th), and 2015 (2nd). In the past 20 years, the first large fire (1,000+ acres) of the season starts earlier, and the last large fire of the season starts later. In busy fire years, such as 2019, Alaska's fire season can extend into the fall.

Looking Forward: 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 lengthen in Alaska. This is resulting in drought stress: persistent bark beetles and other forest pathogen activity; and fires burning deeper in the duff and later in the summer. Deep duff burning favors establishment of hardwood rather than conifer dominated forests. Since deciduous species tend to be less flammable than spruce during lightning season, changes in forest composition may help offset some of the projected increase in wildfires. Some models predict the annual area burned to double over the next few decades in interior Alaska and western Canada, even with the predicted shift in vegetation. A new wildfire potential is also emerging in arctic tundra north of the Brooks Range where there is little recent record of large fires. This is likely linked to shrinking sea ice, warmer summers and more lightning. To adapt to the changing wildfire environment in Alaska, the BLM AFS is transitioning its workforce to address extended fire activity and add positions for fuels mitigation projects to meet increasing wildfire risk reduction needs. Despite this, filling wildland fire position vacancies at BLM AFS remains a challenge.

For more information

Visit the Alaska Fire Service website at
www.blm.gov/alaskafireservice