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Department of  
Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: May 10, 2019

## **Governor Dunleavy urges Alaskans to prevent, prepare for wildfires**

**(Fairbanks, AK)** – After one of the earliest and warmest springs on record, Gov. Michael J. Dunleavy wants to make sure Alaskans are ready for what could be an early and dangerous wildfire season.

The governor has proclaimed May 12-18 as Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week in Alaska, and is urging Alaskans to take personal responsibility in helping to prevent human-caused wildfires this summer.

“Wildfires pose a dangerous and costly threat to communities, infrastructure and natural resources,” Governor Dunleavy said. “Mother Nature typically starts enough wildfires in Alaska each summer that she doesn’t need any help from us. Be careful. Be safe.”

In his proclamation, the governor said Alaskans need to be vigilant in helping to prevent wildfires and adhering to safe burning practices to reduce the number of human-caused fires in Alaska.

Approximately 80 percent of wildfires in the state of Alaska protection areas are human-caused, according to statistics compiled by the Alaska Division of Forestry. Those fires are the most dangerous because they tend to be close to urban areas where the majority of people live and recreate.

This year’s warm, dry spring conditions have led to a more vigorous start to Alaska’s wildfire season. As of May 8, there have been 91 fires reported in 2019, which have burned 7,078 acres. That compares to only 23 fires and 27 acres burned by the same date last season. All but one of this year’s fires have been caused by humans.

Norm McDonald is the Division of Forestry’s new wildland fire and aviation chief, who took over from retired Fire Program Manager Tom Kurth on May 1. McDonald echoed Governor Dunleavy’s sentiments about preventing human-caused fires.

“People need to follow the safe burning guidelines that the state Division of Forestry has listed on burn permits,” McDonald said. “That includes clearing the area around burn barrels, debris piles and campfires down to mineral soil, having tools and water on hand, never leaving a fire unattended and not burning on windy days. It’s all common-sense stuff, but every year we have multiple wildfires caused by unsafe burning.”

With hotter, drier days on the horizon, Alaskans need to be careful with any activity that can ignite a wildfire, whether debris burning, burn barrels, campfires, ATVs, target shooting, charcoal grills or the myriad other ways that wildland fires can ignite. Here are a few tips for homeowners to make their homes more resistant to wildfires:

- Get a burn permit and follow the Division of Forestry’s safe burning guidelines listed on them.
- Remove flammable materials like leaves, dry grass and wood piles from around your home, your roof and your rain gutters.
- Create defensible space by removing spruce trees within 15 feet of your home and pruning the limbs on trees 8-10 feet off the ground to reduce ladder fuels that enable fire to climb into the canopy of trees.
- Create and practice an evacuation plan for your family to use in the event of a wildland fire.

Remember, those who light fires are responsible for them, and could be held responsible if that fire escapes due to negligence.

To read the proclamation, view the attached .pdf file, or go to:

<https://gov.alaska.gov/newsroom/category/proclamations/>

For more information about safe burning in Alaska, go to <http://forestry.alaska.gov/burn>

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# STATE OF ALASKA



## *Executive Proclamation* by *Governor Michael J. Dunleavy*

WHEREAS, Alaska's breathtaking wildlands serve as habitat for fish and wildlife, provides abundant recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and is home to vast timber resources, and that enrich our Alaskan lifestyle; and

WHEREAS, wildland fires are a natural part of the ecosystem and are crucial to the maintenance of forest health; they are inevitable, unpredictable, and can spread at a swift pace, endangering lives and property; and

WHEREAS, Alaska's wildland fire management agencies share the common goals of promoting personal safety and reducing loss of life, while preserving and enhancing the health of forests and wetlands; and

WHEREAS, naturally caused wildland fires are part of a healthy ecosystem, fires caused by people occur every year, and pose a threat to residents, firefighters, and property. Wildland fires pose a serious public safety concern, so Alaskans must use precautions, practice prevention, and be prepared to protect the communities that are surrounded by, and intermingled with, undeveloped lands; and

WHEREAS, on average, more than one million acres burn from wildfires in Alaska each year, making public awareness of wildland fire prevention practices and preparedness measures crucial for public safety.


NOW THEREFORE, I, Michael J. Dunleavy, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF ALASKA, do hereby proclaim May 12-18, 2019 as:

### *Wildland Fire Prevention and Preparedness Week*

in Alaska, and encourage all Alaskans to recognize the importance of wildfires to the Alaskan landscape, be aware of their potential for damage, and commit to educate themselves on how to reduce the threat of wildland fires to their homes, property, and community.

Dated: April 29, 2019



  
Michael J. Dunleavy, Governor  
who has also authorized the  
seal of the State of Alaska to  
be affixed to this proclamation.