

NPS Wildland Fire Management in Alaska

Prepared by Brad Cella, August 3, 1999

Wildland Fire Management for the NPS units in Alaska is unlike that of NPS units elsewhere in the system.

The NPS is not responsible for the primary suppression efforts on wildland fires in the National Parks, Preserves and Monument in Alaska. The NPS does not maintain an extensive wildland fire suppression capability, routinely initial attack wildland fires in NPS units, or have numerous personnel dedicated to wildland fire suppression in Alaska NPS units.

Shortly after the passage of the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA) the Land Use Council, a federal oversight organization determined that it was not cost effective for each Department of Interior land management bureau to maintain separate wildland fire management organization. Since the Bureau of Land Management had been conducting wildland fire suppression operations in Alaska, they were selected to provide wildland fire suppression services on Department of Interior and Native Corporation lands. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry provided wildland fire suppression on State lands and the USDA Forest Service provided wildland fire suppression services on Forest Service lands.

State and federal land ownership, however, is intermixed throughout Alaska. For operational efficiency, regardless of land ownership, the BLM provides suppression services on all lands in the northern portion of the Alaska and the State in the southern portion. The USDA Forest Service provides wildland fire suppression services on Forest Service lands located on the Kenai Peninsula, the southern coast areas and the Alaska panhandle (Attachments 1 & 2). The Forest Service provides suppression services on federal lands if they are the closest available fire suppression resources. In the early 1980, the BLM created the Alaska Fire Service (AFS), as a separate BLM program, to provide the increased wildland fire suppression services. The NPS is expected to provide qualified personnel during wildland fire emergencies in Alaska and the contiguous United States. Departmental Manual, Part 620 Wildland Fire Management, Chapter 2: General Policy and Procedures – Alaska - provides Departmental policy and guidance regarding wildland fire suppression and organization in Alaska

The wildland fire management responsibilities of the Alaska Fire Service and the NPS are delineated in an Interagency Agreement. The Interagency Agreement between the Alaska Fire Service, Bureau of Land Management and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry delineates the wildland fire services that the State will provide on Federal lands. Copies of these agreements are available through the Regional FMO.

Although wildland fire suppression services are provided by the State, AFS and Forest Service the Regional Director and Superintendents are ultimately responsible for action taken on NPS lands. Departmental Manual, Part 620, Chapter 2, 2.4 Policy section A. states, "Nothing herein relieves agency administrators in the Interior bureaus of the management responsibility and accountability for activities occurring on their respective lands." 2.4 Policy section C. further states, "Each bureau will continue to use its delegated authority for application of wildland fire management activities such as planning, education and prevention, use of prescribed fire, establishing emergency suppression strategies, and setting emergency suppression priorities for the wildland fire suppression organization on respective bureau lands."

The bottom line is: **The suppression organizations provide wildland fire suppression services to the National Park Service. The National Park Service determines what will be protected, acceptable wildland fire management activities, and land/resource management objectives on the lands managed by the National Park Service. If the NPS does not provide the leadership and management necessary during wildland fire management activities and incidents, other organizations/agency may take actions that do meet NPS mandates, policies and land/resource management objectives.**

NPS Wildland Fire Management Organization

The NPS in Alaska does maintain minimal wildland fire management capability to meet the responsibilities outlined in DM 620, Director's Order #18: Wildland Fire Management, and to insure that:

- (1) the organizations providing wildland fire suppression services meet NPS needs, mandates and policies,
- (2) the Regional Director and Superintendent have wildland fire management expertise and resource management information, immediately available to assist with wildland fire management decisions concerning the protection of people and resources within NPS units,
- (3) the NPS is an active participant in setting direction and priorities of interagency wildland fire management in Alaska,
- (4) Alaska needs and perspectives are incorporated into the NPS wildland fire management program, and
- (5) the NPS continues to provide qualified individuals for emergency wildland fire mobilizations.

The NPS wildland fire management organization in Alaska is the following (Attachments 3):

Regional Fire Management Officer (RFMO): Brad Cella
FIREPRO Program Assistant (FPA): Karen La May
Area Fire Management Office (AFMO)r: Jan Passek
Area Fire Management Officer (AFMO): Marsh Lutz

Jan Passek is the Area FMO for western Alaska NPS units that receive FIREPRO funding. The AFMO provides wildland fire management leadership and expertise to the Superintendents of WEAR, LACL and DENA. DENA is the administrative park. The AFMO is duty stationed there and the administrative support for her and the FIREPRO crew is provided by DENA. A two-person crew and a Jet Ranger helicopter are assigned to support wildland fire and other resource/park management activities in the cluster parks.

Marsh Lutz is the Area FMO for eastern Alaska NPS units that receive FIREPRO funding. The AFMO provides wildland fire management leadership and expertise to the Superintendents of GAAR, YUCH and WRST. WRST is the administrative park for the AFMO and the FIREPRO crew. A two-person crew and a Jet Ranger helicopter are assigned to support wildland fire and other resource/park management activities in the cluster parks.

Karen La May, FPA provides administrative assistance to the Regional FMO and the parks. She coordinates dispatch of NPS personnel for wildland fire assignments and preparation of daily situation report during the wildland fire season. She also is the technical specialist for wildland fire record database, the wildland fire and incident management qualification and training system, and computer support for interagency wildland fire management training courses, EPR AKSO and incident management teams.

Brad Cella is the Regional Fire Management Officer of the Alaska Region. He provides wildland fire management leadership and expertise for the Regional Director, AKSO Superintendent and Superintendents of NPS units that do not receive FIREPRO funding. These units are ANIA, GLBA, KATM, KEFJ, KLGO, and SITK. He represents the NPS on the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group, the group responsible for the setting priorities and direction for interagency wildland fire activities in Alaska. He also represents Alaska on the NPS Fire Management Leadership Board (FMLB). The FMLB consists of the Regional FMOs, NPS-National Interagency Fire Center Program Managers and the National FMO.

All of the Alaska wildland fire management personnel serve on regional and national task groups and committees to insure that Alaska perspectives and needs are considered in the development of policy and procedures, formulation of priorities and program directions. They also serve as instructors for NPS and interagency wildland fire training courses at the regional and national levels.

Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan

Thirteen area-specific interagency wildland fire management plans were completed between 1982 and 1988. Fire planning on this scale has not been accomplished anywhere in the world. Objectives of the area-specific interagency wildland fire management plans were to: (1) protect human life and specific resources, and (2) insure that the costs of wildland fire suppression are commensurate with the resources to be protected while enabling wildland fire to

fulfill its ecological role when possible. NPS personnel, usually resource management specialists, participated as planning team members, and in some cases served team leaders during the statewide wildland fire planning efforts.

Each land manager/owner determined what fire protection level was required for the lands they managed. The land manager/owners selected the fire management categories based upon the laws, enabling legislation, mandates, and policies that apply to the lands they managed, values/resources to be protected, fire behavior and ecology, and human use patterns. If land manager/owners selected different options for adjacent lands, attempts were made to negotiate an agreement on the selected option or determine reasonable boundaries if options differed. Every effort was made not to use administrative boundaries (e.g. park boundaries) but to select option area boundaries that were identifiable from the air and were feasible considering an operational and fire behavior concerns. The land managers/owners could select one of the four categories: Critical, Full, Limited and Modified for specific areas depended upon the values to be protected.

Critical Fire Management Option: Wildland fires in this category receive the top priority for response. Villages, structures inhabited as a permanent homesite and national significant cultural resources are assigned this category.

Full Fire Management Option: Wildland fires in this category receive immediate initial attack with the intent to control the fire at the smallest reasonable size. This category is the second priority for response to protect significant natural (e.g., commercial timber) and cultural resources.

Limited Fire Management Option: Wildland fires in this category do not receive initial attack. Fires are monitored to insure that they do not escape the Limited Management areas or threaten resources identified for protection. Suppression actions may be taken within the Limited option areas to protect isolated public use/private structures, allotments, cultural resources, or natural resource that meet the criteria for protection. About 75 percent of lands within NPS Alaska units are categorized in the Limited option.

Modified Fire Management Option: Wildland fires in this category receive initial attack if they occur before a predetermined date. Fires that start after the predetermined date are monitored to insure that they do not threaten protected resources or threaten to escape the Modified Management areas. This category receives a low priority for response after Critical and Full and was created to reduce the number of wildland fires when potential fire activity is high, and also reduce suppression costs while enabling wildland fire to accomplish resource goals when fire activity is low.

The Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management (AIWFMP), amended October 1998, combined into one document, the operational elements of the thirteen original area-specific plans, the 1984 amendment as well as updated wildland fire management terminology and clarified the original text. Now land managers only need to refer to the AIWFMP. The original thirteen area-specific

plans serve as historical references. Copies of the AIWFMP and the area specific wildland fire management plan appropriate to the park should be available at each NPS unit. Additional copies are available in the AKSO Wildland Fire Management Office.

NPS Personnel Responsibilities

Regional Director

The Regional Director is responsible for all wildland fire management activities in the Alaska Region. He has delegate daily operational responsibility for Alaska Region Wildland Fire Management Program to the Regional Fire Management Officer. The Regional Director has identified that all Superintendent of NPS units that receive FIREPRO funding will attend the national level interagency training course entitled, "Fire Leadership Management."

Superintendents

The Superintendent is responsible for all wildland fire management activities on the NPS unit that they manage. This includes, but not limited to:

- (1) preparedness activities,
- (2) prescribed fire/hazard fuel reduction activities,
- (3) prepare and approve the Limited Delegation of Authority,
- (4) approve of the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis,
- (5) identify resources, structures and values to be protected,
- (6) insure that fire is allowed to play its role in the ecosystem to the fullest extent possible, and
- (7) provide trained and qualified personnel to interagency wildland fire mobilizations during fire emergencies.

The Superintendent must insure that a senior staff member with basic knowledge of wildland fire management in Alaska and park protection concerns is available during the fire season to serve as Agency Administrator, if the Superintendent is not available (this includes weekends).

Key Park Staff

Key Park Staff (Resource Managers, Chief of Maintenance, Chief/District Rangers, and Chief/District Interpreters) need to be knowledgeable of basic fire management operations in Alaska and have a rudimentary understanding of the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan. Key Park Staff may be called upon to serve as the Agency Administrator when the superintendent is not available. Natural and cultural resource management staff may be called upon to assist with preparation of the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis and serve as Resource Advisor to a Type I or II Incident Management Team.

Wildland Fire Management Staff

Area FMOs provide the Superintendent and park staff with fire management leadership and expertise. The AFMO assists the Superintendent with wildland fire management decisions and interactions with the suppression organizations including preparing the Limited Delegation of Authority, preparing and approving the WFSA, and insure that NPS directions, needs, mandates and policies are met during wildland fire management activities. The AFMO provides the daily management of park(s) wildland fire management program including continual updating of information on values to be protected, assessing selected fire management option and boundaries, wildland fire training and qualifications of park staff, routine hazard fuel reduction and response/management of wildland fire incidents.

Fire Starts

If NPS personnel or visitor locate a wildland fire start, notify the AFS Zone Dispatch or State Area Dispatch that provided suppression serves to the NPS unit (Attachment 4). Contact either the Area FMO or Regional FMO responsible for the park wildland fire management program (See Attachment 4). If the appropriate AFMO is not available contact the Regional FMO. If the Regional FMO is not available contact the Duty Officer identified on the Wildland Fire AKSO Website. The AFMO or RFMO will contact the Superintendent if they have not already been contacted.

Funding

The annual FIREPRO budget is prepared by the AFMO, FPA and Regional FMO and submitted to NPS-NIFC. FIREPRO funding provides for the regional and park wildland fire management programs including permanent and temporary personnel costs, support costs, capitalized equipment, training, program management (NPS and interagency activities), helicopter costs (availability, flight time, fuel and pilot subsistence), and programmatic hazard fuel reduction. Each The wildland fire management personnel, park representatives, and program coordinators such as telecommunication and GIS land cover mapping, meet annually to determine field season schedules for the FIREPRO crews and helicopters. Park budget allocations are based, in part, on the scheduled field season activities.

If a fire(s) starts in an NPS unit and over \$500 will be spent to manage the incident an emergency wildland fire account can be established. Usually the AFMO contacts the RFMO for an emergency account number, however, if necessary park personnel may contact the RFMO if the AFMO is not available. An emergency account number can be assigned 7 days a week during the fire season. The RFMO is responsible for providing the AKSO fiscal manager the information needed to initiate the emergency wildland fire account. The emergency fire account can be used to fund costs associated with management

of the wildland fire incident including, but not limited, to personnel costs, premium pay, and aviation costs. The Superintendent may choose to either, (1) backfill - pay overtime or emergency hire an temporary employee on the AD rate, or (2) have the base 8 paid for the employee while they are on the fire assignment. The Superintendent may also request assistance to relieve park staff from wildland fire management responsibilities if other park duties demand their attention. Contact the AFMO, RFMO, DO-18 or RM18 for additional guidance on the appropriate use of wildland fire emergency accounts.

Use Guidelines of NPS Wildland Fire Management Helicopters

Prepared by Jan Passek, DENA

In order to ensure safe operations around the two fire contract helicopters assigned to Denali National Park and Wrangell-St Elias National Park and Preserve the following guidelines have been established. These guidelines define the users role and responsibilities while utilizing the helicopters. All users must comply with the policy and guidelines already set forth in NPS60, Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide (IHOG), Departmental Manual and your local aviation policy.

Priority for helicopter use:

Human life emergencies
Wildland fire responses
FIREPRO activities
Other Park activities

Each helicopter will have a seasonal helicopter manager assigned to provide for safe operations around the helicopter, daily scheduling and completion of the OAS 23's. The helicopter manager does not work every day that the helicopter is available or does the manager ride on the helicopter for each flight. Therefore, the user must take on responsibilities to ensure safe operation around the helicopter for their flight. The flight manager position is designed to achieve that goal.

- A flight manager must be designated for every flight. The flight manager is the person responsible for coordination with the pilot regarding the safety and efficiency of the flight. The flight manager must be current in their basic aviation class (OAS -B3) and should have experience working around helicopters. Any Individuals participating in special use activities must be currently trained for those activities regardless of the availability of a trained Helicopter manager or flight manager.
- It may be possible that the fire crew can assist as the lead special use activities when the flight manager does not meet the qualifications. Requests and arrangement must be made through the appropriate Fire Management

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Officer. Users should be prepared to pay overtime and hazard pay costs associated with the project.

- The flight manager will ensure:
 - Flight plans are filed (noting full names of all passengers).
 - Explain to pilot what is given to the pilot on mission, flight route and expectations, to include terrain and elevations at landing sites.
 - Passengers are in full personnel protective equipment for the mission
 - Safe egress of passengers to and from the aircraft
 - Manifests are completed with flight weights of equipment and personnel for all segments of the flight.
 - Correct accounting information is given to fire helicopter manager.
 - Ensures that there is no deviation from established flight plan or intended use except in an emergency situation or when such deviations are relayed to flight following locations.

It is especially important that the aforementioned tasks are completed when NPS staff members are working with cooperators to conduct projects. The Host Park must provide a flight manager to coordinate safe operations around the helicopter.

Costs:

Users will be charged current contract flight time rate plus .2 of the current availability for each hour flown. For example, the 1998 rates for availability and flight time were \$750.00 and \$ 302.00 an hour respectively. User costs were approximately \$450.00 per flight hour. This cost is substantially less than an on-call helicopter, and saves the user ferry time. Also at times during the summer field season on-call helicopters may not be available. Availability charges are prorated for flights less than one hour. For periodic use the fuel costs are covered by the .2 availability charge. If extended use, with a high number of flight hours is requested, the user will be expected to purchase additional fuel. The OAS 23 is used for recording all flight time, availability charges and appropriate account numbers.

Flight Schedules:

Flight managers need to coordinate with the fire-pro helicopter manager during normal duty hours to coordinate flights. Notification of flight cancellations should be made to the helicopter manager as soon as know. After hour notifications can be made on ccmail or left on voice mail. Flight managers will also be notified by the same means with updates on the helicopter schedule. A cancellation of a flight by the helicopter manager or weather does not necessarily guarantee the user the next flight out. All attempts will be made to work out fair rescheduling. Weather, mechanical and emergencies can not be planned and all users must be flexible.

Mandatory items for all Special Use Flights:

SPH 4 or 5 helmet

Nomex flight suit or nomex pants and shirt

Nomex gloves

All Leather boots covering the ankle – or exceptions in your parks aviation policy.

Recommended items:

Daypack – with survival equipment

Park radio with spare batteries

Wildland Fire Management Reference Materials

1. Department Manual, Part 620, Chapter 2 – Alaska
available on Internet www.doi.gov
2. Director's Order #18: Wildland Fire Management
distributed to all NPS units
3. Reference Manual – 18: Wildland Fire Management
distributed to all NPS units
4. Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan
distributed to all NPS units
5. Area-Specific Interagency Fire Management Plan
distributed to all NPS units
6. Interagency Fire Protection Agreement between the Bureau of Land
Management and the National Park Service
contact Regional FMO
7. Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook
distributed to all NPS units
8. Director's Order #60: Aviation Management
in draft
9. Reference Manual – 60: Aviation Management
in draft
10. Interagency Helicopter Operation Guide
distributed to all NPS units

*Contact Area FMO or Regional FMO for additional copies

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Attachment 1. Alaska Wildland Fire Protection Areas

Attachment 2. Alaska Wildland Fire Administrative Units and Operational Centers

Attachment 3. Alaska Wildland Fire Management Organization



Alaska Wildland Fire Mgt. Org.

AK System Support

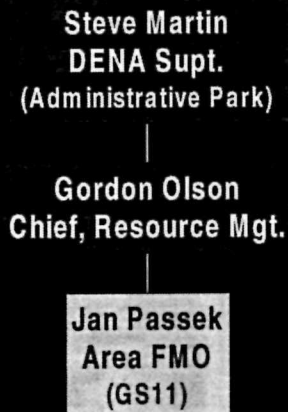


Region FMO provides leadership for NPS wildland fire programs and activities in Alaska, technical support to Reg. Directorate and Supts., and represents NPS on Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group and Statewide MACG

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Alaska Wildland Fire Mgt. Org.

Western Area
DENA, LACL & WEAR

Area FMOs responsible for leadership of wildland fire management programs in Area Park units and provide technical support to Area Supts.

Eastern Area
WRST, GAAR & YUCH

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Attachment 4. Wildland Fire Contact List, August 1999

NPS Wildland Fire Management Personnel

| | Office | Home | Pager |
|--------------|----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Brad Cella | (907) 257-2643 | (907) 696-8942 (907) 561-5471 | (888) 858-7243 pin 111912 |
| Karen La May | (907) 257-2540 | (907) 349-4798 | |
| Jan Passek | (907) 683-9548 | (907) 683-4120 683-9663 | |
| Marsha Lutz | (907) 822-5237 | (907) 822-5407 | |

Parks

Fire Operation Center(s)

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ANIA/KATM | State – Southwest Area Office, McGrath District FMO Judy Reese (907) 524-3010 |
| DENA | BLM/AFS – Tanana Zone Zone FMO Ed Strong (907) 356-5570 Anchorage, Mat-Su (Big Lake) District FMO Lynn Wilcock (907) 892-6027 |
| GAAR (Central & Eastern) | BLM/AFS – Tanana Zone Zone FMO Ed Strong (907) 356-5570 State Lands – Northern Region Regional FMO Jim Lewandowski (907) 451-2675 |
| GAAR (Western) | BLM/AFS – Galena Zone Zone FMO Ken Coe Fire Season (800) 237-3644 (907) 656-1222 Non-fire season (907) 356-5613 |
| GLBA | US Forest Service – Tongass National Forest, Chatham Area – Chatham FMO Leon Mark (907) 747-4294 |

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Attachment 4 (cont.). Wildland Fire Contact List, August 1999

| <u>Parks</u> | <u>Fire Operation Centers</u> |
|------------------------|---|
| KEFJ | US Forest Service – Chugach Forest Seward Ranger District – District FMO Mark Black (907) 224-3374 Forest FMO Mike Stubbs (907) 271-2835 |
| KLGO | State – Haines Area Office Area Forester Ray Josephson (907) 766-2120 |
| LACL | State – Southwest Area Office, McGarth District FMO Judy Reese (907) 524-3010 |
| SITK | US Forest Service – Tongass National Forest, Chatham Area – Chatham FMO Leon Mark (907) 747-4294 |
| WEAR | BLM/AFS – Galena Zone Zone FMO Ken Coe Fire Season (800) 237-3644 (907) 656-1222 Non-fire season (907) 356-5613 |
| WRST (Central) | State – Valdez Copper River Area Area FMO Gary Mullen (907) 822-5534 |
| (Northeast) | State – Tok Area Area FMO (acting) Ray Kraemer (907) 883-5134 |
| (Yakutat) | US Forest Service – Tongass National Forest, Chatham Area – Chatham FMO Leon Mark (907) 747-4294 |
| YUCH (Southern) | BLM/AFS – Upper Yukon Zone Zone FMO Mike Silva (907) 356-5616 State – Tok Area Area FMO (acting) Ray Kraemer (907) 883-513 |