THE STATE of ALASKA
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The Honorable Alan Austerman, Co-Chair
The Honorable Bill Stoltze, Co-Chair
House Finance Committee
Capitol Rm. 519
Juneau, AK 99801

During the House Finance committee meeting on January 31, questions were asked by committee members and the Department of Natural Resources offered to provide some follow-up. The questions are italicized and underlined.

Question: How long does it currently take to get a permit, in particular a tideland permit for a dock?

At the beginning of FY12, there was a backlog of 2,658 authorizations including applications for permits, leases, easements, material sales, water rights, and reservation of water applications. As of the end of CY2013, the backlog stands at 1,237 permits, a reduction of 53.5%. The Division of Mining, Land and Water (DMLW) has been able to reduce cycle times for certain authorizations, in particular those related to leasing and material sales due to statutory changes.

For permits issued in CY 2013 it took on average a little over 4 months for an applicant to receive a permit. The median amount of time took about 6 weeks for the issuance of a permit. As the Division continues to work applications that come in the door daily, it also works on those applications that have been in backlog. As the backlog is reduced further, average processing times should decrease.

For tideland permits related to docks, 9 dock permits were issued during CY 2013 within 3-9 months of their applications being received by the Division of Mining, Land and Water. There are various reasons why it may take longer to adjudicate the dock permit applications received. Often it is because the applicant did not respond with a required development plan, did not timely respond to a request for additional information, or the applicant refused to take responsibility for the dock – when trying to resolve potential trespass situations.

When examining issued dock permits in CY 2013, it appears that when the Division has a willing applicant that supplies all the information needed, and there are no other critical issues that challenge the issuance, the Division can generally issue a permit within 4 months for smaller docks and a lease within 2 years when a larger dock is being applied for. (Note: prior to a lease being issued, often an Early Entry Authorization (EEA) is issued to allow the applicant to begin construction and "get to work" even though the final lease for the dock has not yet been issued. A lease is issued only when a complete appraisal and survey is completed and submitted to DMLW.)

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Question: Does DNR not put fires out until they endanger structures?

No, the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan identifies four level of protection for initial attack response when a fire starts, either from human or natural ignitions. The four levels are: Critical, Full, Modified and Limited. Most of the area around the immediate Fairbanks area is in either Critical or Full protection which means, any fire ignitions will be aggressively initial attacked, with a goal of minimizing acreage burned and rapid extinguishment to protect human life and property. The main difference between these two levels of protection is that during times of limited resources, due to other ongoing fires, the Critical protection area will have priority for resources over the Full protection area.

Things get a little more complicated with the other two categories. The Limited level is primarily used in more remote locations, where fire can be allowed to burn and play the important role it has in keeping the boreal forest healthy and productive. Habitat is a key item here, and most interior animal species depend on a mosaic habitat with a variety of vegetation both in age and species composition. The Division works closely with ADF&G and other landowners/managers to determine areas designated for Limited status. When cabins or other human improvements are located in Limited protection areas, we will usually utilize the concept of "point protection" to protect that resource. This means we will utilize a variety of fire suppression techniques to limit or prevent damage to the identified resource.

The last category is Modified. Areas with this designation are treated as Full protection earlier in the year, when fires have the potential to get large and burn all summer, but around mid-July, this designator switches to a Limited (the conversion date) and fires can be allowed to burn. Areas with this designation are less remote and are areas where fire would be beneficial, but only later in the fire season because of risk to nearby higher level protection lands. The conversion date varies by year and is determined by the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (AWFCG) based on weather and other risk factors.

Firefighting is a complicated topic and once a fire escapes initial attack, another whole process is initiated to determine the best response to suppressing or monitoring a fire. If there is interest, the Division of Forestry is willing to discuss this process and topic in further detail with the committee.

Question: Why is DNR spending so much on fire fighting rather than being more proactive?

The Division of Forestry is very proactive in fire prevention, public awareness and in advanced planning. We have Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) for many communities in the state. The CWPPs are a collaborative effort between wildfire suppression agencies, federal, state, and local governments, community groups and individuals that outline a risk assessment and mitigation plan for the community.

The primary objective of hazard fuels reduction or vegetation treatments is to remove enough of this fuel to reduce the risk posed by wildfire. In general, fuels treatment projects reduce surface fuels and/or maintain healthy forests using thinning and limbing techniques. These plans identify areas of high risk due to proximity to fuels, topography and important resources, like homes, and make recommendations on the location of fuel treatment projects to help reduce risk.

The Division also promotes the Firewise program, which teaches home and business owners how to reduce the risk to their individual properties from wildland fire.

Most wildland fires are caught, but even in Critical and Full protection areas, a small number escape our initial suppression efforts. When this happens, fires can become large and expensive to suppress, despite our concerted efforts to keep costs in line with objectives for any given incident. We are constantly looking for ways to contain costs and be effective and efficient at fighting wildland fire.

Question: Can DNR allow more firewood cutting in the Fairbanks area to help minimize wildfires and smoke pollution?

The forests around Fairbanks are being actively managed for both commercial and personal use. The Division has a bi-annual timber sale program in the Fairbanks Area Office of larger sales for commercial operators and is working on a larger value added (AS 38.05.123) timber sale for Superior Pellets LLC to help supply their increased need for wood. While these activities will help reduce fire risk, it is not possible to fully prevent wildland fires through forest harvesting and management. As an example, the fires in and around Fairbanks this year would not have been prevented by more aggressive forest management. The largest, the Stewart Creek fire, came off of military training lands and was the result of "live" fire training.

Question: How much has DNR spent on fire in the past few years and in particular, how many fires and number of acres fought?

Fire management planning, preparedness, suppression operations, prescribed burning, and related activities are coordinated on an interagency basis. The Division of Forestry has cooperative agreements with the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, and numerous local government and volunteer fire departments to respond to wildland fires, reduce duplication of efforts, and share resources.

In 1984 the State of Alaska adopted the National Interagency Incident Management System Incident Command System concept for managing fire suppression. The Incident Command System (ICS) guiding principles are followed in all wildland fire management operations.

The table below breaks down the costs of fire based on the entity responsible for the fire on a calendar year basis. For example, a fire in state protection on federal land is 100% federal fiscal responsibility. The table below does not demonstrate which protection area the fires were located in but depicts on whose land the fires burned. The table demonstrates who is ultimately responsible for paying the bill (USFS, AFS, or State) and not who paid the bill first (e.g. instances where the state pays but is later reimbursed).

Please note that for CY2013, the difference between the total costs and those associated with specific agency fiscal responsibilities are attributed to bills from the Northwest Wildland Fire Protection Agreement, also known as the Northwest Compact (NWC). This compact allows for different states (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Washington) and Canadian territories (Alberta, British Columbia) to request assistance from each other for use of personnel, equipment, supplies, or aircraft in fighting wildland fires. The costs have not been charged against specific fires and thus the responsible parties for payment have not yet been identified.

Landowner	CY2011		CY2012		CY2013	
	# of Fires	Acres	# of Fires	Acres	# of Fires	Acres
BLM-AFS Fiscal Responsibility						
Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)	2	8.3	4	122.0	1	465.3
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)	26	46,595.6	39	51,620.2	41	408,622.8
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	31	30,347.6	30	40,057.2	37	108,216.7
Military Lands	32	10,010.9	16	61,304.5	30	97,623.2
Native Claims Act (NCA)	26	25,575.2	41	38,883.4	73	71,030.1
National Park Service (NPS)	17	7,790.1	22	76,820.8	27	169,018.6
BLM-AFS Fiscal Responsibility Costs	**$8,907,883**		**$6,809,846**		**$35,326,590**	
State Fiscal Responsibility						
Private	220	2,951.2	148	303.2	238	2,298.9
State of Alaska	130	169,683.0	99	17,772.0	147	459,009.4
Boroughs	22	54.2	12	4.1	10	2.4
State Fiscal Responsibility Costs	**$41,167,109**		**$9,731,417**		**$30,079,337**	
USFS Fiscal Responsibility						
US Forest Service (USFS)	9	1.9	5	0.5	9	1.1
USFS Fiscal Responsibility Costs	**$0**		**$7,656**		**$0**	
Total (Fires/Acres)	**515**	**293,018.0**	**416**	**286,887.9**	**613**	**1,316,288.5**
Total Cost	**$50,074,992**		**$16,548,919**		**$69,206,877**	

Question: How many streams in the state have reservations of water?

As of February 4, 2013, there are 62 streams in Alaska that have a reservation of water. Some of these streams have multiple reaches or segments of the stream that contain reservations. For example, there are 6 segments of the Chatanika River that have a reservation of water. DMLW has issued 89 reservations of water, 56 of which were issued after 2009 (beginning in 2010). All reservations were issued for purposes of reserving water for fish use and to maintain habitat for fish. Only four of the reservations were not issued to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) and instead were issued to DNR as they were associated with applications for removal of water for export or sale.

(Note: there are over 700,000 rivers and stream throughout the state of Alaska.)

Question: Can you tell us who the organizations are that applied for reservations in the Chuitna River?

The Chuitna Citizens No-Coalition was the organization that applied for (3) water reservations on Middle Creek or Stream 2003. Stream 2003 is a tributary of the Chuitna River and the stream that runs through

the proposed project area of PacRim Coal. ADF&G has an application for a water reservation on the main stem of the Chuitna River.

Question: What is the timeframe for DNR to report back to the Legislature on whether or not the Department(s) intend to pursue assumption of the regulatory program for dredge and fill activities?

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the lead agency for assumption of the program, anticipates being able to report to the Legislature in 2015. DNR has attached a letter sent to all legislators on Jaunary 24, 2014, with DEC's update on efforts undertaken by the State thus far.

If there are any additional questions, please contact Esther Tempel, our Legislative Liaison, or Jean Davis, our Support Services Director.

Sincerely,

Joe Balash
Commissioner