



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of Natural Resources**

DIVISION OF FORESTRY/FIRE & AVIATION

3700 Airport Way  
Fairbanks, AK 99709  
Main: 907.451.2675  
Fax: 907.451.2690

March 6, 2018

Representative Guttenberg, Co-chairs Tarr and Josephson, and members of the House Resources Committee:

The Division of Forestry supports House Bill 355, "Human Caused Wildfire Reduction Act." This bill is directed to state statutes in Title 41. Public Resources, Chapter 15 Forests, Article 1. Protection of forested land, originally authored in 1961. These statutes are directed primarily at regulation, prevention, and suppression of activities to reduce the threats of wildland fire while still allowing activities such as cooking, warming, or debris clearing.

Since their inception, Alaska has seen a significant increase in population and related growth in the wildland urban interface. This is an area where Alaskans enjoy both desirable homesites and direct access to recreation. It is also where we have seen a steady increase in human caused wildfires that are both expensive and catastrophic.

The Division of Forestry works cooperatively with federal and local governments to protect citizens from wildland fire on land that is owned privately, by the state, or by a municipality, per AS 41.15.010. Our suppression responsibilities are primarily the southern half of the state with the populated and developed communities. This area sees wildland fire starts that are about 79% human and 21% natural caused. These fires can be expensive and catastrophic, for example, cost wise:

- Hastings Fire (Fairbanks) - \$20 million,
- Funny River Fire (Kenai) - \$13 million,
- Parks Highway Fire (Nenana) \$10 million,
- McHugh Fire (Anchorage) \$6 million,

or wildland fires with extensive loss of improvements, businesses, and homes:

- Miller's Reach (Wasilla, 1996) – 344 structures, estimated \$15 million loss,
- Caribou Hills (Kenai, 2007) – 88 structures, estimated \$8.2 million loss,
- Sockeye (Willow, 2015) – 60 structures, \$10 million lost.

These fires are all human caused, started by a single ignition point, and resulted in the loss of cabins, homes, and businesses. In many parts of Alaska, affordable insurance is not practical and structures may not be insured. Replacement becomes the responsibility of the homeowner. Preventing even one destructive, expensive, long duration fire would be well worth the collective effort of the citizens, the legislature, and the Division of Forestry. We support the intent of HB 355 to coalesce this effort.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Kurth".

Tom Kurth,  
Chief, Fire & Aviation  
Alaska Division of Forestry  
(907) 451-2675 (office)/590-3184 (cell)  
<http://forestry.alaska.gov>