



DNR Division of Forestry in the FY2023 Governor's Budget

*House of Representatives
Natural Resources Finance Subcommittee*

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DOF's requests in the Governor's budget will:

- increase public safety while reducing fire costs,
- generate public and private sector jobs, and
- create efficiencies, improving service and productivity.

Division of Forestry's three primary missions:

1. Wildland fire protection,
2. Reducing hazardous fuels by creating fire breaks,
3. Managing state forests and providing timber to the industry.





1. Alaska's Fire Department

- DOF protects the lives and property of Alaskans on over 150 million acres
- The demand for fire suppression has increased dramatically due to:
 1. increasing length and intensity of fire seasons, and
 2. Alaskans' desire to live in the wildland/urban interface.



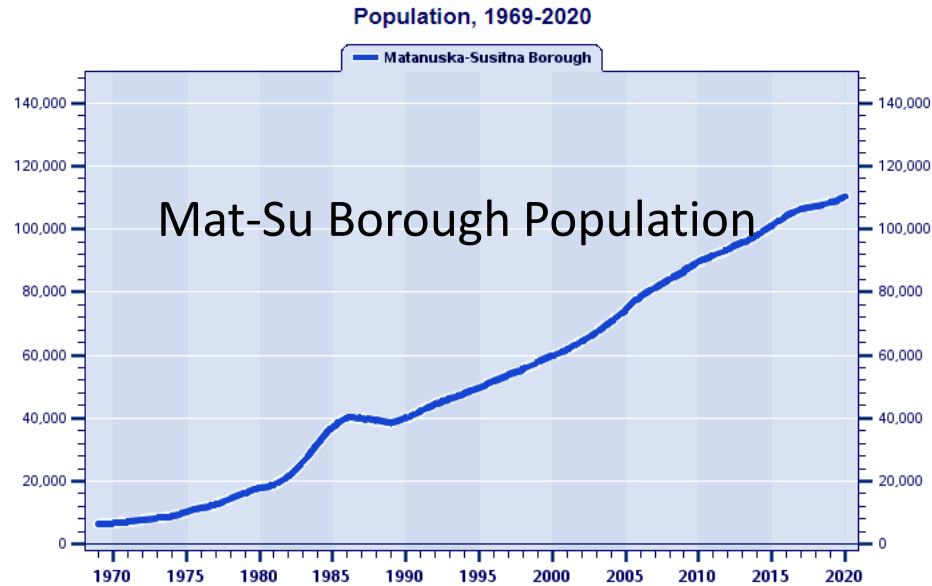
2. Reduce Hazardous Fuels

- DOF works proactively to prevent fires from threatening communities by building fire breaks.
- Fire breaks around communities reduce risk and are a cost-effective and efficient way to fight wildland fire.

3. Timber Sales

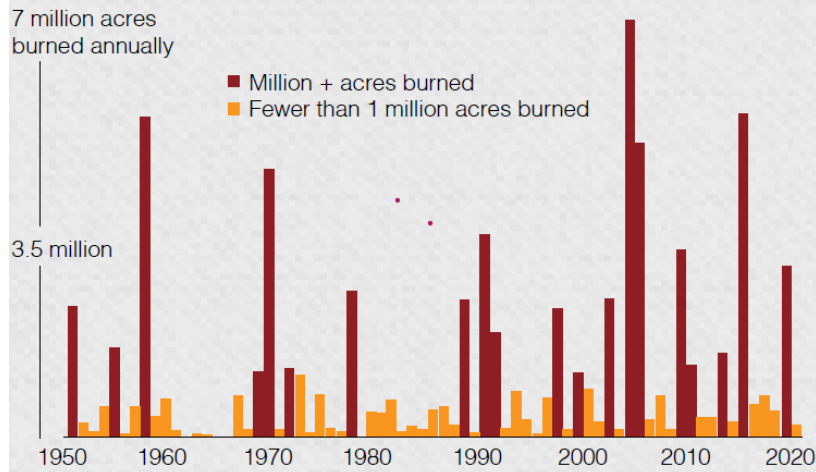
- Provide timber sales on state and federal land to industry
 - economic opportunities statewide
 - road access to state land
- Conduct inspections to protect fish, water quality, and to provide for reforestation.





INCREASED ACRES BURNED 7

Area burned by wildfire varies tremendously from year to year. Factors such as temperature, drought, and earlier snow melt contribute to this variation. The past 20 years have experienced a clear shift toward more frequent large fire seasons with millions of acres burned, although years with relatively few burned acres are still common.



The Challenge:

- DOF's firefighting mission has become more complex.
 - more intense fires, longer seasons.
 - more people live in fire-prone areas
- Firefighter numbers have decreased.
 - significant budget cuts in 2016, flat budgets since.
- The Division is currently unable to staff to Preparedness Level 3.
 - PL3: normal high fire danger summer day.
 - Rely on importing Lower 48 resources

Problems with relying on Lower 48 crews



Alaska's Gannett Glacier crew

Imported resources are not reliably available: Alaska competes with other states.

Response times can be as long as 72 hours.

- A quick aggressive initial attack with local forces helps limit fire size and duration, reducing costs.

The cost to import firefighters and support staff far exceeds using Alaskan resources.

- On a fire assignment, a 22-person Alaskan crew costs **\$6,500/day**.
- A 22-person Lower 48 crew costs **\$13,500/day**. (Travel to Alaska, rental vehicles, *per diem*, shipping gear, etc.)

Lower 48 crews are not familiar with Alaskan fuels types and fire behavior.

The Solution:

Build Alaska's wildland fire response capacity

An increased operating budget for DOF will decrease funds spent on fire suppression, for an **overall cost savings to the state.**

Creating a self-sufficient, well-trained Alaskan firefighting force will reduce the need for importing expensive and often unavailable Lower 48 crews.



A photograph of two firefighters in yellow protective gear and blue helmets, looking upwards in a forest setting. The firefighter on the left is wearing a black helmet and has a saw attached to his belt. The firefighter on the right is wearing a blue helmet with a clear visor and earplugs. They are both looking up at something out of frame, possibly a tree or a fire. The background is a dense forest with green foliage.

The Solution: Reinstate the Alaska Wildland Fire Academy

- **Workforce development** is the key to building back Alaska's wildland firefighting capacity.
- The Fire Academy budget was cut in 2016. Reinstating it will provide **career training** and **jobs** for new firefighters and support staff.
 - Rural Alaska fire crew numbers have dwindled drastically: from 56 crews in 2010 to fewer than 8 crews in 2021.



The Solution: adequate facilities & equipment

State of Alaska
Division of Forestry

Wildland Fire
Operations and
Cache Facility

ECI Alaska
Relocation Analysis
March 22, 2020

Eagle River Fire Crew Facility

- Replaces facilities no longer available to support two 22-person fire crews.
- Training location for firefighters.
- Provide secure winter warm storage for \$6 million of fire engines.

Fire Crew Vehicles

- Replaces dilapidated, unreliable emergency response vehicles.
- 1990s-era vehicles break down often, requiring maintenance that puts crews out of service.
- In 2021, Alaska fire crews were out of service for 12 days due to inoperable vehicles.




Investing in Alaskan firefighters will pay dividends

Compare an annual investment of **\$3.3 million** to:

State suppression costs by season:

2015: \$63 million 2019: \$82 million

Investing in our capability to catch fires when they are small, or to prevent them from starting, will save the state money.



Investing in Alaskan firefighters will pay dividends

An annual investment of **\$3.3 million** pales in comparison to the amount spent suppressing large, complex fires.

2021 Haystack Fire (Fairbanks): **\$3.0 million**

2019 Swan Lake Fire (Kenai Peninsula): **\$49 million** (federal)

2019 Shovel Creek Fire (Fairbanks) **\$22 million**

2019 McKinley Fire (Mat-Su): **\$8.5 million**

2015 Sockeye Fire (Mat-Su): **\$8.2 million**

2015 Card Street Fire (Kenai Peninsula): **\$7.1 million**

2011 Moose Mountain Fire (Fairbanks): **\$4.2 million**

Catching **just one fire** before it becomes a large complex fire will justify our investment.

Suppression costs do not include millions of dollars in health care, lost homes, infrastructure, and commerce.



The risks of maintaining the status quo

Increased fire danger is the new normal nationwide.

In Alaska in 2019:

- 719 wildfires burned 2.6 million acres, the second-most destructive season on record in Alaska
- Alaska imported nearly 5,200 firefighting personnel from the Lower 48
- The Swan Lake Fire (Kenai Peninsula) was the most expensive in the nation, at nearly **\$49 million**.
- Total assistance for rebuilding lost homes and infrastructure: **\$234 million**

Five of the 10 largest fire seasons on record since 1950 have been in the last 17 years.

With increasingly extreme fires in the Lower 48, Alaska will not receive adequate assistance. We need to become self-sufficient.

The benefits of acting now

Creating a self-sufficient Alaskan firefighting force will **increase public safety, save suppression costs and create jobs** statewide.

We have the chance to create a safer Alaska for the next 50 years.





Timber resources budget request: creating jobs

Operating budget increment

\$460.0 – Timber resource capacity

- 4 permanent full-time positions (3 timber resources staff and 1 equipment operator)

Replacing forestry positions will revitalize the timber industry statewide.

- Valuable jobs: many are located in rural areas that offer few stable, long-term jobs.
- Jobs added in small communities create stable economic opportunities for working families.



Forestry **jobs** in Alaska

- The timber industry contributes **1,580 jobs** and nearly \$111 million in labor income annually to Alaska's economy.
- For every wood products manufacturing job in the state, **another 1.2 jobs** are supported in related sectors.



The risks of maintaining the status quo

DOF will not meet the demands of the timber industry statewide.

- Timber mills will close
- Alaskan forestry jobs will be lost
- Staff will be inadequate to develop new markets (fiber, fuelwood, mass timber, etc.)
- Insufficient response to insect outbreaks



Benefits of acting now

Realizing the full potential of Alaska's timber resource

- Creating **well-paying jobs** that provide a living wage
- Improving economies in rural communities
- Increasing access to state lands with forest roads
- Providing **revenue to the state** with a renewable resource
- Diversifying Alaska's economy
- Developing new timber products



Budget Detail

Operating budget request detail

\$3,300.0 – Increase wildland fire program capacity

- 30 permanent full-time fire positions (\$2,190,000)
- Health care for seasonal firefighters (\$350,000)
- Extension of funded months for 46 fire and support staff to match Alaska's fire season (\$760,000)





Operating budget request detail, continued

\$500.0 – Reinstate Alaska Wildland Firefighter Academy

- Build Alaska's capacity for self-sufficient wildland fire protection.
- Provide jobs and workforce development in rural Alaska.
- Rebuild village fire crews, increasing public safety statewide.

Capital budget request detail



\$13,856.4 – Eagle River Wildland Fire Crew Facility (federal request: Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund)

- Replace facilities no longer available to support our fire crews.

\$720.0 – Fire Crew Vehicle Replacement (FY2022 Supplemental)

- Aging vehicles are unreliable and endanger Alaskans and firefighters.