

Lessons Learned from the McKinley Wildfire

The 2019 McKinley wildfire burned north of Wasilla during the driest summer on record. Lessons learned from the McKinley wildfire are shared in this infographic with the goal of helping other Alaskans better prepare for future wildfire.



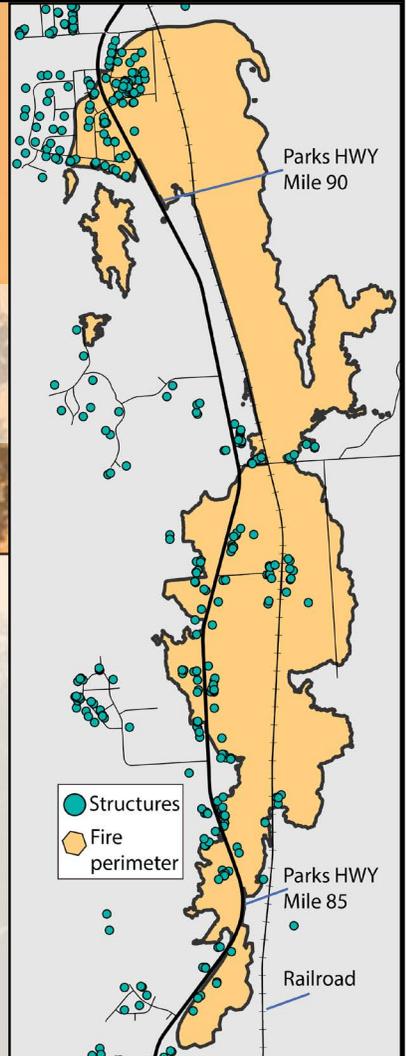
Structures lost:
3 commercial
52 residences
84 outbuildings



Suppression cost:
\$11-15 million



Acres burned:
3,288



Extended wildfire season

Instead of a normally rainy August, dry and warm conditions persisted in Southcentral Alaska, resulting in an unusual wildfire season that lasted until the end of September.

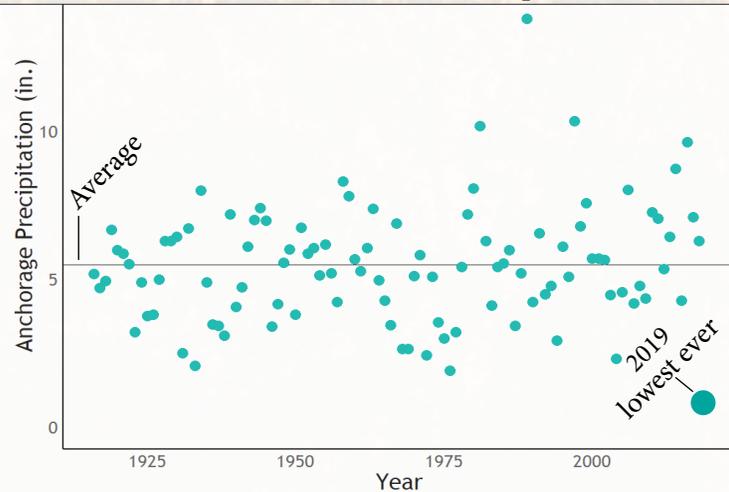


Figure credit: Brian Brettschneider
Data Source: National Center for Environmental Information

Fire Location

Residents affected by the wildfire are scattered across small independent communities.

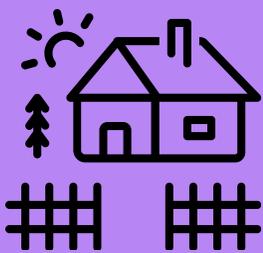
The impacted communities are alongside the Parks Highway which connects to the more urban areas of Wasilla and Anchorage.

Living in the Wildland Urban Interface

Most residents in Alaska live in or near boreal forests, creating a wildland-urban interface. Living so close to nature comes with many benefits, but also comes with the imminent risk of wildfire. Wildfires in boreal forests are a natural process, and extra precautions are critical to protect lives and property and to help firefighters work safely.

Out of the Ashes: Key Lessons

Preparedness



Defensible space
Work with your neighbors
Evacuation plan

Evacuation



Be aware of surroundings
Prepare your property
Tell others you are safe

Recovery



Winter comes quick
Recover as a community
Consider insurance



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Preparedness - Take matters into your own hands

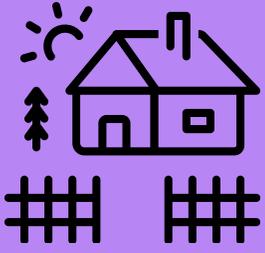


Photo by Naomi Hutchens

Take matters into your own hands and respect the danger of wildfire.

Defensible space

Wildfire is a natural part of the environment in Alaska. Creating defensible space is one of the most important ways to protect your property from wildfire. [Alaska Firewise](#) provides recommendations on how to achieve a high level of protection from wildfire.

Clear distance from structures:

Within 15 feet:

- remove all conifers

From 15-30 feet:

- prune trees, keep 15 ft between branches of conifers

From 0-100 feet:

- remove dead or dry vegetation



Photo by Naomi Hutchens

Work with your neighbors

Reducing wildfire risk and evacuating safely takes teamwork.

Removing large trees can take teamwork. By clearing the area you provide firefighters with space to do their job safely.

Hazardous materials and homes without defensible space can create danger for the entire community.

Toxic fumes and explosions pose a serious risk. Be aware of potential hazards ahead of time and do what you can to minimize risk.

Evacuation plan

Know where to get information prior to a wildfire occurring.

Have a friend or relative outside the region lined up to help.

Have a plan for your pets. Pets can impede firefighting efforts.

Have a “go bag” or emergency kit prepared.

[Alaska has a comprehensive guide to preparing for disasters:](#)
- <https://tinyurl.com/ReadyAlaskaDisaster>



Photo by Alaska Division of Forestry

Evacuation - Pay attention, stay informed



Photo by Ted Altman

Know where to find information on evacuation and changing fire conditions.

Be aware of your surroundings

Pay attention to your surroundings because social media and alerts are not failsafe.

Key evacuation and warning resources:

- [Incident Information System](http://inciweb.nwcg.gov)
inciweb.nwcg.gov
- [AK Wildland Fire Information](http://akfireinfo.com)
akfireinfo.com
- [DNR Current Information](http://forestry.alaska.gov/fire/current)
forestry.alaska.gov/fire/current
- [AK Wildland Fire Mapping](http://tinyurl.com/AKFireMapping)
tinyurl.com/AKFireMapping
- [AK Homeland Security](http://ready.alaska.gov)
-ready.alaska.gov



Photo by Randi Jandt

Prepare your property

It may be a long time before you are able to return to your property.

Consider measures to protect your property and resources beyond defensible space.

Make firefighting as easy as possible. When a fire is approaching use sprinklers to wet down your roof and decks. Prior to evacuating, attach hoses to your water spigot and arrange them to reach every part of your house. If the fire threat is immediate turn them on, otherwise leave them at the ready for firefighters. You do not want to run out of water as the fire comes closer.

Keep your perishables from spoiling. Consider preparing generators ahead of time to protect perishables incase of long periods without power.

Photo by Alaska Division of Forestry



Let others know you are safe

Everyone counts!

Be sure to check in with local authorities after evacuating to a safe place. Not checking in can lead to unnecessary resources being spent on search and rescue efforts.

Keeping a charged cell phone can help with the check in process.



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Available in-print and online:
Frames.gov/AFSC/McKinley-Infographic



Recovery - Plan deliberately, act fast



Photo by Jess St. Laurent, Alaska Department of Natural Resources

Individual actions matter.

Get signed up for aid quickly and be aware follow up contact may be needed.

Rebuilding before winter may not be possible.

Living away from your property is hard, but consider accepting rental assistance to make it through the winter.

Accept donations wisely. Make sure they will suit your needs through the winter and do not prevent you from getting other assistance.



Photo by Naomi Hutchens

Winter comes quick

Recovery as a community

Create a wildfire recovery team as soon as possible.

Use insights from other wildfire recovery teams to speed up recovery efforts.

Local representation on recovery boards is key to ensuring help is directed towards where it is needed, and needs are met.

Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) are coordinated working groups that can help get recovery groups established and coordinate donations. They are helpful in speeding up the recovery process.

Community wildfire protection plans (CWPPs) are extremely valuable for directing recovery efforts.

Coordinate donations carefully because they can create problems down the road.

Consider insurance

Insurance can help with a quicker recovery.

Outbuildings are not covered by insurance, and many tools, winter clothes and other resources were lost.

Insurance does not cover damages not directly due to the wildfire.



Photo by Randi Jandt