

STATE RESPONDING TO FIRE NEAR NENANA

Steve Brawn

Story Created: Jul 8, 2009 at 10:59 AM AKDT

(Story Updated: Jul 14, 2009 at 11:19 AM AKDT)

The state Division of Forestry says the Minto Flats South fire about 13 miles northwest of Nenana has grown to more than 79,000 acres and is threatening cabins, timber and a drilling rig. A management team has been assigned to the fire, which was started June 21 by lightning. The team also will manage the 3,700-acre Lunch Lake fire, about 20 miles north, in the area about 50 miles west of Fairbanks. The Alaska Interagency Coordination Center reports there are 38 firefighters at the Minto Flats South Fire. It's one of seven fires staffed with firefighters. More than 50 more are burning in the state. The center reports 354 fires have burned 511,025 acres so far this year. At this time last year, 267 fires had burned 24,912 acres.

Steve Brawn

Story Created: Jul 9, 2009 at 10:00 AM AKDT

(Story Updated: Jul 14, 2009 at 10:51 AM AKDT)

While Alaska tourists and residents alike are enjoying the warm, dry weather this summer, it is making for nearly perfect conditions for wildfires. Several large wildfires are burning in Alaska. One of those, the Railroad Complex fire in interior Alaska, is actually three fires, and by far the state's largest at 156,343 acres. Gary Lehnhausen with the state Division of Forestry says most fire suppression resources are being put on the smallest of those fires. The June Creek fire south of Nenana is just 360 acres but fire officials hope to stop it before it grows. Lehnhausen said he expected "extreme fire behavior" on Monday with the fire situation worsening in the afternoon. Skies are hazy in some areas, including at two national parks, where views are being periodically obscured by smoke.

Steve Brawn

The Associated Press

Story Created: Jul 15, 2009 at 11:36 AM AKDT

(Story Updated: Jul 17, 2009 at 11:13 AM AKDT)

A large Alaska wildfire sparked by lightning more than three weeks ago continues to increase in size but firefighters are making progress. The Railbelt Complex fire 12 miles from Nenana is actually three separate fires, and at 161,344 acres was the largest fire in the state on Wednesday. Fire spokesman Gary Lenhausen says firefighters were able to hold the line on the 360-acre June Creek fire, the smallest of the three. He says the fire should be contained within the next day or two. Firefighters also have kept the 4,515-acre Lunch Lake fire from moving into high-value timber stands. Lenhausen says firefighters now will focus on the largest of the three – the 156,469-acre Minto Flats South fire - to keep it from destroying homes and cabins.

Minto Flats fire flares, spreads, 200,000 acres burned

Anchorage Daily News / adn.com

Published: July 19th, 2009 10:08 PM

Last Modified: July 20th, 2009 09:43 AM

FAIRBANKS -- The giant Minto Flats South fire burning near Nenana flared up on its southern edge Sunday, threatening structures, said Gary Lehnhausen, a spokesman for the state Division of Forestry. Smoke plumes shot into the sky 10,000 to 15,000 feet. Fire crews set burns to halt the fire near a cabin and private airstrip on Teklanika Channel Lake. Smoke jumpers on Saturday used torches that drip a slow burning fuel onto the ground, burning up dry brush and timber so that the main wall of fire has no place to go. The fire came within a half mile of that cabin and was about a mile and a half from other cabins on the Teklanika River, Lehnhausen said. In addition, water-scooping aircraft are being used to cool down and slow the spread of the main fire. Cabin owners have bought pumps and hoses to defend their property and firefighters are working with them to help create defensible space. If the fire does close in, they've got a good escape route on the river, Lehnhausen said. Flights are still being restricted over the Minto Flats fire because of safety considerations with local air traffic. Aircraft not connected with the fire cannot fly over the area between 8 a.m. and midnight. The Minto Flats fire had burned about 200,000 acres as of Sunday. Two other fires in the Railbelt Complex, the Lunch Lake Fire and the June Creek Fire, are much smaller.

ALASKA'S NEWSPAPER

Yahoo! Buzz

News Sports Outdoors Features Money Entertainment Opinion

Minto Flats fire flares, spreads, 200,000 acres burned: Fire | adn.com Page 1 of 4

<http://www.adn.com/2009/07/19/869859/minto-flats-fire-flares-spreads.html>

Alaska wildfires have burned 1 million acres

By MARY PEMBERTON

The Associated Press

Published: July 20th, 2009 09:30 AM

Last Modified: July 21st, 2009 11:11 AM

Firefighters on Monday were conducting burnout operations on a large wildfire of more than 200,000 acres near Nenana in hopes of removing fuels and keeping the blaze from moving closer to cabins along the Teklanika River. Water-scooping aircraft also were being used on the Railbelt Complex fire. The Railbelt fire was begun by lightning nearly a month ago and has grown to nearly 219,000 acres. It is one of several large wildfires burning in Alaska, where so far this year more than 400 fires have burned more than 1 million acres in the state. State officials say the Railbelt Complex fire is affecting air quality, especially north of Denali National Park where the smoke-filled air has been deemed unhealthy and even hazardous at times. Firefighters were helping people living in cabins near Nenana clear trees and brush from around their homes.

in the event that a growing wildfire reaches dozens of cabins along the Teklanika River. Residents also were being told to remove wood piles from against their homes and store four wheelers, snow machines and machinery with flammable liquids away from structures. Several property owners have purchased pumps and sprinklers and were getting help from firefighters in setting the equipment up. "We have had folks in the area between the fire and cabin corridor for the whole last week," Jennifer Yuhas, a spokeswoman for the Railbelt Complex fire, said Monday. "To date, we've been successful." The fire is creeping along through the hardwoods, finding.

ALASKA'S NEWSPAPER

Yahoo! Buzz

News Sports Outdoors Features Money Entertainment Opinion

Alaska wildfires have burned 1 million acres: Fire | adn.com Page 1 of 4

<http://www.adn.com/2009/07/20/870318/alaska-wildfires-have-burned-1.html>

Bellow July 24th 2009

STATE AND REGIONAL FORECAST

ARCTIC SLOPE

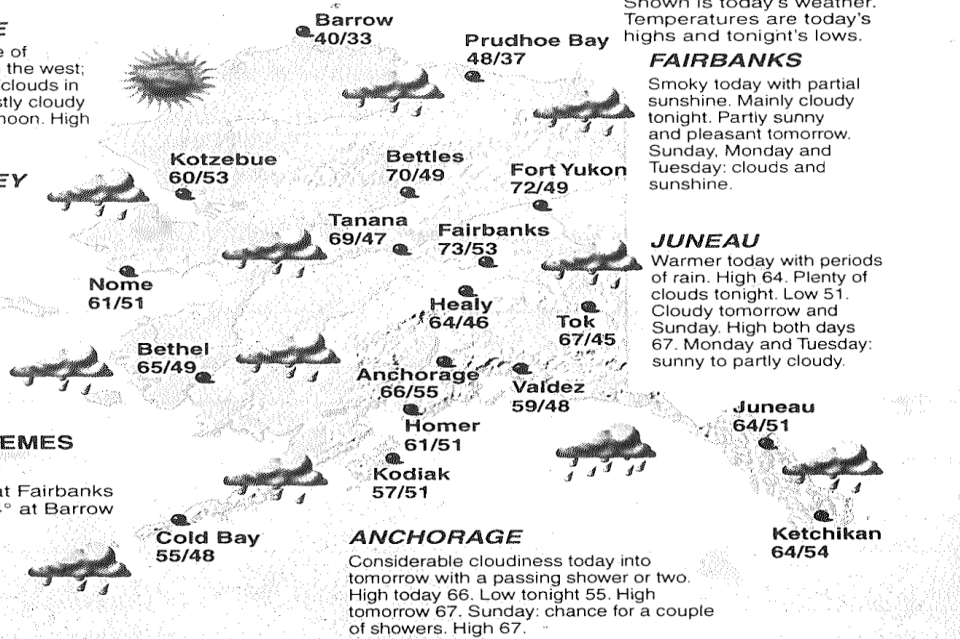
Cloudy today. A couple of showers, except dry in the west; sun and areas of high clouds in the morning, then mostly cloudy in the east in the afternoon. High 39 to 53.

TANANA VALLEY

Clouds limiting sun today. Windy in central parts in the afternoon; pleasant in northwestern parts. High 64 to 70. Partly cloudy tonight. Low 45 to 53.

ALASKA EXTREMES YESTERDAY

High 72° at Fairbanks
Low 24° at Barrow



Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

FAIRBANKS

Smoky today with partial sunshine. Mainly cloudy tonight. Partly sunny and pleasant tomorrow. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday: clouds and sunshine.

JUNEAU

Warmer today with periods of rain. High 64. Plenty of clouds tonight. Low 51. Cloudy tomorrow and Sunday. High both days 67. Monday and Tuesday: sunny to partly cloudy.

ANCHORAGE

Considerable cloudiness today into tomorrow with a passing shower or two. High today 66. Low tonight 55. High tomorrow 67. Sunday: chance for a couple of showers. High 67.

Bellow July 25th 2009

Jeff Richardson: jr Richardson@newsminer.com or 459-7575

Smoke expected today

Wildfires blaze through Interior

By AMANDA BOHMAN
abohman@newsminer.com

Winds from the south are expected to blow wildfire smoke into Fairbanks today, according to the National Weather Service.

The air should be better on Sunday with changing winds, but smoky conditions could return by nighttime, forecaster Cary Freeman said.

"Sunday night, it looks like everything

ONLINE

To check the latest air quality index for Fairbanks, go to www.co.fairbanks.ak.us/airquality/.

turns back against us again," Freeman said.

At least a dozen wildfires are devouring hundreds of thousands of acres of forest in Alaska's Interior, according to a report by state and federal agencies that monitor and battle the blazes.

The fire closest to Fairbanks, the Wood

River 1 Fire, is burning 38,000 acres of military land about 27 miles to the south.

"It's not an immediate threat to Fairbanks," Alaska Fire Service spokesman Doug Stockdale said. "There're a number of creeks and a river that it would have to go over. If it did become a problem, we have air tankers, smoke jumpers and other resources."

Lightning sparked a fire near Fox on Thursday, but it was doused quickly, a state fire management officer said.

Near Nenana, the Railbelt Complex fires have surpassed a quarter-million acres, a report from the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center stated.

Please see SMOKE, Page B3

SMOKE

Continued from Page B1

Firefighters are continuing to protect valuable timber, cabins and a drilling site.

Forest fires also are burning near Healy, Anderson, Fort Yukon, Circle, McCarthy and McGrath. Nearly 400 firefighters are assigned to the blazes, according to the AICC.

A receptionist at the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce said the annual Golden Days Grande Parade will go on despite possible smoky air.

The parade is scheduled to start at 10 a.m. today at the Carlson Center.

"We've been planning this for too long," Austyn Tanner said. "We will not cancel anything."

Air quality on Friday was deemed moderate. For the latest air quality index, go to www.co.fairbanks.ak.us/air-quality/.

Contact staff writer Amanda Bohman at 459-7544.

25

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B Interior/Alaska

BIDEN BARKS
Vice president criticizes Russia.
B7

Jeff Richardson: jr Richardson@newsminer.com or 459-7575

Sunday, July 26, 2009

Interior fires continue to spread

By **RENA DELBRIDGE**
rdelbridge@newsminer.com

Smoke and haze can be expected to linger over the Interior into next week as a series of wildland fires builds.
The Railbelt Complex of three fires southwest of

GET MORE
For more about Doyon Drilling's Arctic Wolf rig, see **Page A1**.
Fairbanks grew more than 3,000 acres on Friday to 269,477 acres, coming

within about four miles of Doyon Drilling's Arctic Wolf rig, which is exploring for natural gas.
The rig is secured with a sprinkler system around its perimeter and firefighters nearby, officials said.
Friday was a significant growth day for the whole

Railbelt," said Alaska Inter-agency Coordination Center public information officer Mike McMillan. "It's not contained. These are big fires. ... They don't anticipate containing the fire's perimeter, but they're trying to protect all resources — allotments, structures,

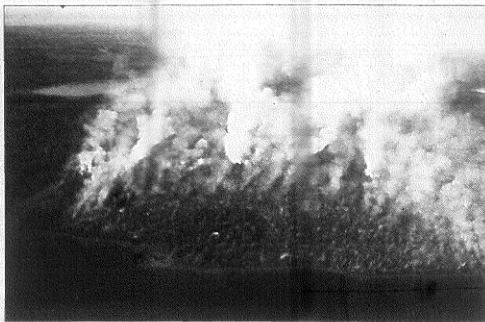
timber."
The Railbelt Complex includes the Minto Flats South Fire at 256,511 acres, the Lunch Lake Fire at 12,802 acres; and the smaller June Creek Fire at 164 acres.
As of Saturday afternoon, 108 fire personnel

were manning the Minto blaze, protecting structures, Tanana River allotments and the Doyon rig. Another 132 firefighters were stationed at Lunch Lake. No firefighters were posted to June Creek.
Please see **FIRES**, Page B6

B6 INTERIOR/ALASKA

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Sunday, July 26, 2009

Mike McMillan
Alaska Fire Service
A cabin on the north-east end of Wilderness Lake was protected by an Alaska Smoke-Jumper burnout operation on Friday.



FIRES: Are scattered across Alaska

Continued from Page B1

On Friday, smoke jumpers responded to Dune Lake to protect cabins about a mile and a half from the Minto Flats South Fire's southern flank. Chena Incident Hotshots Crew protected cabins in the Teklanika drainage, and crews on the northern side of the complex built fire breaks to prevent flames from jumping into Native allotments and other resources.
Protection includes cutting fire lines directly, at the fire's edge, and indirectly, around structures, to redirect the blaze from resources, McMillan explained.

Flammable brush often is burned between the break and the resources, creating a zone without fuel. When possible, crews use natural barriers such as rivers, lakes and meadows, to aid their efforts.
So far, the Railbelt Complex has held within the "Big Box," an area surrounded by natural fire breaks in which officials hope to control flames. The box is bordered on the north and east by the Tanana River to the north and east; the Teklanika River to the southeast; Comma Lake on the south; and the Kantishna River on the west.
Also in the Tanana fire

zone, about 37 personnel are on the Zitziana Fire at Wien Lake, Blind Luck Lake, Wilderness Lake and West Twin Lake. The area has many fly-in cabins, McMillan said.
Fire officials said they need local boats and operators to hire to transport firefighters and cargo to the field at the Railbelt Complex. In particular, they need jet boats and operators with solid knowledge of the Teklanika River. For more information, contact incident Public Information Officer Sarah Saarloos at 378-3843.
Contact staff writer Rena Delbridge at 459-7518.

Zitziana
The Zitziana Fire has burned about 105,000 acres west of the Railbelt Complex. It is being fought by 48 firefighters, most of whom were defending structures at Wilderness, Wien and West Twin lakes.
Three smoke jumpers are on the scene.

Stevens Creek 1
The Stevens Creek Fire is located about 20 miles north of Manley Hot Springs and has burned nearly 28,000 acres.

Little Black One
Little Black One Fire covers almost 200,000 acres about 17 miles north of Circle and the Yukon River.
Fifty-five firefighters have been deployed to the blaze, which was being driven to the southeast by the wind.

Railbelt Complex
The Railbelt complex includes the Minto Flats South, June Creek and Lunch Lake fires.
It covers approximately 270,000 acres and is being fought by 163 firefighters approximately 12 miles northwest of Nenana.

Wood River 1
The Wood River fire has burned about 61,000 acres 25 miles south of Fairbanks. It is responsible for most of the smoke in the Fairbanks area and is being fought by 12 firefighters.

Chakina
The Chakina Fire covers more than 31,000 acres south of the Chitna River. It is 10 miles south of McCarthy and is being fought by 85 firefighters, including members of local volunteer fire departments.

rough a route would save city, suburban
a unit.
Please see SALES, Page B2

Wood River fire grows

Smoke continues to drift into Fairbanks

By CHRISTOPHER ESKEMAN
ceskema@fairbanks.com

A wildfire south of Fairbanks has doubled in acreage in recent days. The "Wood River" fire, which burned more than 61,000 acres by Sunday afternoon, the fire, 25 miles southwest of town, released a column of smoke that led clouds looking like something from the movie "Independence Day."

The fire was reported at 29,000 acres on Wednesday. Since then, hot, dry weather has continued to compound Alaska's already fiery fire season.

The north and northeast edges of the Wood River fire — well south of Fairbanks' southern border and the Tanana River — grew faster than other fronts, carrying the fire into pockets of black spruce trees and producing smoke plumes Saturday and Sunday, according to the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center.

Smoke drifted into overhead "pyrocumulus" clouds, formed in part from the heat emitted from the fire, said Pepper Weimer, a synoptical meteorological technician at the National Weather Service's Fairbanks office on Sunday afternoon.

"Because the fire is so hot during the day, it forms its own clouds south of Fairbanks," she said. "And the smoke is rising and mixing with those clouds."

Smokejumpers cleared around nearby homes and cabins last week to protect the structures from the blaze, the agency reported. Fairbanks should continue to see smoke during the next few days.

More than 1.5 million acres have burned in Alaska so far this year, making this wildfire season worse than most during the past half-century, according to data from state and national fire agencies.

Contact staff writer Christopher Eskeman at 466-7582.

"Because the fire is so hot during the day it forms its own clouds south of Fairbanks."

— Pepper Weimer, National Weather Service

making things up



Daily News - Minor

"Independent in All Things ... Neutral in None"

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Fire watch

Much vigilance needed as dry spell continues

Interior Alaska is in a remarkable run of dry weather, and forecasts don't show much change in the near future. The situation requires vigilance and caution from every resident.

The smoke from distant and not-so-distant wildfires has grown tiresome, but it presents no immediate threat of trauma for most people. The far greater danger is that posed by a carelessly tossed cigarette, a stray spark from a loaf or a smoldering backyard barbecue fire. Any of the above could ignite some nearby fuel and turn a neighborhood into an inferno.

Those boiling cumulus clouds that have risen above forest fires during the past month reveal the intense heat generated by such events. The fires are difficult to stop in the high temperatures and low humidity levels we're experiencing each afternoon, and so it's imperative that they not start in the first place.

State firefighters have been doing a great job protecting remote cabins, timber and other resources where they are threatened by the massive burns that dot the landscape. In Fairbanks, municipal fire departments have quickly put the damper on smaller fires that have popped up.

Their track records are good, but there is no reason to test the limits of their abilities. Attention to any source of flame is essential as we enter another week of hot, dry weather.

How to get into print

No fire relief in sight

By AMANDA BOHMAN
abohman@newsminer.com

Forest fires like hot, dry weather, and that's what they're getting for the foreseeable future, according to the National Weather Service.

"Right now, we have absolutely nothing in the forecast

but sun and clouds and sun and high temperatures," said hydrological meteorological technician Pepper Weimer.

With wind drying forest land, Alaska Fire Service spokesman Doug Stockdale described conditions as "perfect fire weather."

Please see FIRES, Page A6

A6

FIRES: Battled by more than 500

Continued from Page A1

"Fires will continue until we have a change in weather that will bring precipitation and cooler temperatures," he said.

At least 13 fires are staffed in Interior Alaska. More are burning and are being monitored.

A group of fires near Nenana, known as the Railbelt Complex, is the largest at nearly 300,000 acres, according to the fire service.

Also, a fast-growing 72,000-acre fire is burning about 27 miles south of Fairbanks.

The city of Nenana is surrounded

by forest fires and has been plagued by smoky air this summer, according to Suzanne Hill, who has lived in the city for decades.

"It's been smoky a lot," she said. "It was really bad this morning."

Stockdale said crews of firefighters usually begin traveling to the Lower 48 about this time of year to help with forest fires Outside.

"We haven't sent anybody south," he said. "We are busy fighting fires here."

More than 500 firefighters are assigned to wildfires in Alaska's Interior.

Contact staff writer Amanda Bohman at 459-7544.

Bellow July 30th 2009

What a way to water

World's largest firefighting aircraft comes to Fairbanks



Eric Engman/
News-Miner
Evergreen Aviation senior vice president Sam White, far left, talks about the four nozzles that dispense retardant as Evergreen Aviation shows off its 747 Supertanker firefighting aircraft Wednesday. Tom George of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, bottom right, photographs the nozzles.

By **JEFF RICHARDSON**
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Evergreen International Aviation is offering a test-drive today that would impress even the most enthusiastic used car salesman.

As part of a pitch to Alaska forestry officials, the Oregon-based company will donate the services of the world's largest firefighting aircraft. The converted Boeing 747-100, dubbed the Evergreen Supertanker, will be used for a test drop on an unspecified Railbelt Complex fire today.

Evergreen said the beefy jet can do things that typical fire-suppression aircraft can only dream about — namely, dropping more than 20,000 gallons of retardant while skimming just 300 feet above the ground. A drop pattern of three miles in length and a football field wide is possible, according to Evergreen.

The company said it spent five years and \$50 million developing the aircraft, which spent Wednesday conspicuously parked at Fairbanks International Airport. State officials, members of the public and media were given a tour of the visiting jet.

State firefighting officials haven't decided whether they'll pursue an agreement to



Eric Engman/News-Miner

A tour group passes the Supertanker at Fairbanks International Airport.

use the Supertanker but are interested to see it in action. Lynn Wilcock, chief of fire aviation for the Alaska Division of Forestry, said a plane with such large capacity could be "another tool in the toolbox" for firefighters.

Jim Baynes, the sales manager for the Supertanker, said the cost of using the plane will vary depending on the situation but it will need to generate about \$3 million per month. He said California forestry

officials have signed a contract to use the plane.

Maggie Rogers, a forestry spokeswoman, said the state routinely budgets to pay for firefighters and equipment, adjusting the amount depending on the severity of the fire season. Two Conair 580 tankers, with a capacity of 2,000 gallons each, are currently under contract.

Please see **PLANE**, Page A5



Eric Engman/News-Miner

Pressurized retardant tanks are displayed in the 747 Supertanker firefighting aircraft.

PLANE: Aircraft can hold 20,500 gallons of water

Continued from Page A1

"We are always interested in seeing what's out there to fight fires effectively and efficiently," Rogers said.

Although the jet has been around for years — it started its life as a Pan Am passenger jet in the 1970s — the Supertanker is a new plane in its current form. After hundreds of test dumps, its first test on an actual fire came during a demonstration in Spain last week.

Today's work will be the first time it is tested on a wildfire in the United States. Baynes said Evergreen is on a worldwide tour to show off the capabilities of the Supertanker.

"We're basically in uncharted territory for aircraft modification," Baynes said. "A lot of people said at the beginning this couldn't be done."

The plane includes 10 water tanks, capable of holding 20,500 gallons of water, foam or fire-suppressant gel. It's forced out by eight compressed-

air tanks, which expel the contents like an aerosol can at a pressure of 200 pounds per square inch.

The equipment and water are heavy, but a 747 is capable of hauling a massive amount of cargo. Even fully loaded, Evergreen said the Supertanker is 150,000 pounds below its maximum takeoff weight capacity.

Baynes said the company is waiting to see how much business the Supertanker gets, but it hopes to attract enough attention to build five in the next three years. The jets could be stationed strategically around the globe, allowing quick response time to a variety of fires.

"We've got to crawl before we can walk," he said. "We'll see what the market bears."

It's a good time for a firefighting demonstration in Alaska. There are 73 active fires in Alaska, including a dozen that are staffed. Six small fires in the Interior were added to the tally on Tuesday, contributing to nearly 1.8 million acres burned in the state

SUPERTANKER AT A GLANCE

- Built from a 1970s-era Boeing 747-100 jet
- Holds as much as **20,500** gallons of water, foam or gel
- Flies as fast as **600** mph
- Drops its payload at **300-600** feet off the ground

— Source:

Evergreen International Aviation

this year.

The Railbelt Complex fire, which is being staffed by 235 personnel, has burned more than 350,000 acres in the Minto Flats area.

Contact staff writer Jeff Richardson at 459-7575.

Fairbanks is Socked In

Thu, July 30, 2009

Posted in Alaska News, Top Stories

Fairbanks is socked in with wildfire smoke, and air quality is in the unhealthy range. A borough air quality specialist says conditions have been deteriorating since the winds shifted early Thursday. Dan Bross, KUAC – Fairbanks

Railbelt Fires Prompting More Response

Thu, July 30, 2009

Posted in Alaska News, Top Stories

Operations are ramping up at the Railbelt Complex fires. The management team is leveling up, and eight additional crews are being assigned to the fires, bringing staffing to around 350 people. The biggest fire in the complex, The Minto Flats South blaze has consumed in excess of 340,000 acres, or about 600 square miles.

Dan Bross, KUAC – Fairbanks

Bellow July 31st 2009



Smoke blankets Fairbanks as traffic moves along Tanana Loop on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus on Thursday. The thick smoke pouring in from wildfires has caused the Fairbanks North Star Borough to issue an air quality advisory for the area.

Sucking smoke



Fran Corcoran, right, who suffers from asthma, wears a mask to protect herself from the smoke that has enveloped Fairbanks as she strolls across the Cushman Street Bridge with her husband, Joe Corcoran, back right, and friends Fran and Enzo LaVecchia, left.

Wildfires send worst air of the summer across Fairbanks

By TIM MOWRY
tmowry@newsminer.com

A little smoke didn't bother golfers in the Alaska International Senior Games in Fairbanks on Thursday. While soccer, football, baseball and softball games and practices were canceled because of the thick, acrid smoke that blew into Fairbanks on Thursday, the senior golfers sucked it up and played through the worst of it.

Call it dedication, tenacity or just plain stupidity, said Pat DeRuyter, one of the 15 golfers who teed off at 9 a.m. for an 18-hole round. "It's either that or we're so old we don't care anyway,"

CANCELED EVENTS

Several outdoor activities have been canceled or postponed:

- All Fairbanks Youth Football events
- All Fairbanks Youth Soccer Association games
- Golden Heart Softball Association games
- Goldpanners/Athletes in Action Fire doubleheader was postponed to today
- Race to Pedro cycling time trial

she quipped. "We weren't going fast enough to breathe hard."

Please see FIRES, Page A6

Good

Visibility 10+ miles
Particulate levels 0-40 micrograms per m³

Moderate

Visibility 6-9 miles
Particulate levels 41-80 micrograms per m³

Unhealthy for sensitive groups

Visibility 3-5 miles,
81-175 micrograms

Unhealthy

Visibility 1.5-2.5 miles
Particulate levels 176-300 micrograms per m³

Very Unhealthy

Visibility 1-1.25 miles
Particulate levels 301-600 micrograms

Hazardous

Visibility 0.75 mile or less
Particulate levels 500+ micrograms per m³

FIRES: Cooler temperatures expected today with possible smoke break

Continued from Page A1

The smoke made things interesting, DeRuyter said. "It was pretty bad," she said of the playing conditions at Fairbanks Golf Course. "We had trouble seeing some of the shots, actually."

Even so, a smoky game of golf beats no golf.

"We're dedicated," said the 57-year-old DeRuyter, who chose to walk all 18 holes she played.

Thursday was the smokiest day of what is turning out to be a smoky summer in Alaska's second-largest city.

A wind shift early Thursday morning blew smoke from fires burning south of Fairbanks into town, covering the city in a fog-like haze for most of the day.

The worst of it came just before noon when the particulate level was measured at 313 micrograms per cubic meter, the highest reading of the season according to borough air quality technician Jim McCormick. The previous high reading was 291 on July 14. That figure also was because of wildfire smoke. Good quality particulate levels are between zero and 40 micrograms per cubic meter.

The Alaska Goldpanners, Fairbanks Youth Football, Fairbanks Youth Soccer Association and Golden Heart Softball Association all canceled their games Thursday because of poor air quality, which was rated as "very unhealthy." That category is the second-lowest of six divisions.

The smoke began to thin slightly later in the day, but it is expected to hang around through the weekend, said meteorologist Kelly Songster at the National Weather Service office in Fairbanks.



Photo by Will Hutto/Inc/Web

Smoke from the Railbelt Complex is seen Tuesday near the Toklat River.

Another warm, dry day Thursday fanned the Wood River 1 and Railbelt Complex fires, the same blazes that have been responsible for the smoky conditions all month in Fairbanks.

The Wood River 1 Fire, 25 miles south of Fairbanks, had burned approximately 83,000 acres, while the Railbelt Complex fire, about 50 miles southwest of town, had consumed an estimated 341,000 acres.

While cooler temperatures are expected today, winds are expected to pick up over the Alaska Range tonight when a chinook blows in, which could fuel the Wood River 1 Fire, Songster said. In addition, the humidity is expected to drop.

"Winds are going to be howling out of the southwest by tomorrow afternoon, with gusts in the Alaska Range up to 45 mph where the Wood River fire is," she said. "That could really fan those flames."

"Winds are going to be howling out of the southwest by tomorrow afternoon. ... That could really fan those flames."

— Kelly Songster

The wind likely will blow smoke back into Fairbanks, Songster said.

The smoke didn't help the almost 250 firefighters battling the Railbelt Complex fires, said fire information officer Gary Lehnhausen with the Alaska Fire Service.

The poor visibility prevented helicopters and air tankers from flying on Thursday, he said.

"It keeps the CL215s on the ground, which are helpful to us calming down the perimeter of the fire so firefighters can get in there and do direct fire line

suppression," Lehnhausen said, referring to the two air tankers being used to drop water on the fire.

The smoke also delayed a demonstration water drop by the world's large firefighting aircraft on the Railbelt Complex fire.

Evergreen International Aviation, an Oregon-based company, was planning to drop more than 20,000 gallons of water on the Railbelt Complex fires Thursday using a 747 Supertanker as part of a sales pitch to Alaska forestry officials to use the jet. The company is trying to convince Alaska

forestry officials to rent the \$50 million jet, a converted Boeing 747-100, for firefighting purposes in Alaska.

The company is hoping to do the water drop today, said Jim Baynes, Evergreen's Supertanker sales manager.

The Wood River 1 Fire, meanwhile, made a push to the east on Wednesday, but most of the fire is moving to the north and northeast, away from cabins along the Wood River.

Smoke jumpers were pulled off the fire Wednesday night after completing several burnouts around cabins, and the structures are being aerially monitored at least twice a day, fire information officer Diane Hunt said.

Firefighters were planning to burn areas around the Blair Lakes Air Force facility and another military site on Clear Creek Butte to protect them.

"There hasn't been any decision to do anything else than to make sure structures in the area are protected," Hunt said. "The majority of the fire is moving north and northeast, and there are some old burns in the surrounding areas that are helping slow the fire down because there's less vegetation to burn."

Firefighters also have a new fire to contend with north of Fairbanks near Circle.

The Bluff Creek Fire six miles west of Circle tripled in size on Thursday, going from 5,000 acres to roughly 15,000, and a Type 2 management team was ordered for that fire, according to fire information officer Maggie Rogers at the Alaska Fire Service. She wasn't sure if the team would come from Alaska or the Lower 48.

Contact staff writer Tim Mowry at 459-7587.

Weather Giving Firefighters Reprieve

Mon, August 3, 2009

Posted in Alaska News

The weather is giving firefighters in Interior Alaska a bit of a reprieve today. Over the weekend, the Bluff Creek fire advanced rapidly. It grew by 10 thousand acres and is now just three miles from the town of Circle. Cooler, calmer weather is allowing crews to protect homes and structures near the town.

Annie Feidt, APRN – Anchorage

New Wildfire Springs up Near Fairbanks

Tue, August 4, 2009

Posted in Alaska News

A new wildfire near Fairbanks is drawing a major response. The Hard Luck Creek Fire is burning about 25 miles northwest west of town near Murphy Dome. The fire has move quickly through volatile black spruce and has burned at least a thousand acres.

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