

Fairbanks NEWSMINER articles:

Tuesday, June 25, 2013

Fire along Parks Highway near Skinny Dick's

Sam Harrel/News-Miner | Posted: Tuesday, June 25, 2013 6:37 pm



A plane drops a load of retardant on a fire burning about four miles north of Mile 325.75 Parks Highway on Tuesday, June 25, 2013.

June 27, 2013

Skinny's Road Fire

Sam Harrel/News-Miner | Posted: Thursday, June 27, 2013 8:12 pm



Traffic follows a pilot car at Mile 325 Parks Highway Thursday afternoon, June 27, 2013, through the smoke from Skinny's Road Fire. A back fire was started alongside the highway Wednesday night when the fire jumped its perimeter and ran toward the road.

Friday, June 28, 2013

No growth today on Skinny's Road wildfire; Parks Highway delays reduced



Sam Harrel/News-Miner

Skinnys Road Fire

Skinnys Road Fire Incident Commander Tim Soliday draws a rough perimeter of the near 1,000 acre fire for Public Information Officer Jim Schwarber on Thursday afternoon, June 27, 2013.

Update 5:15 p.m. Friday: As of this evening, the fire had not grown today and was still 1,400 acres, according to Alaska Division of Forestry spokesman Pete Buist. As conditions improved Friday, the section of the Parks Highway on which pilot cars were required was reduced. As of 5:30 p.m., pilot cars will only be needed for a 10 mile section of highway, instead of 27 miles, said Alaska Department of Transportation spokeswoman Hannah Blankenship. Expect delays of up to 20 minutes. The pilot car section is between Miles 322-332 and pilot car operations are expected to continue through the weekend. Updates will be issued as conditions change.

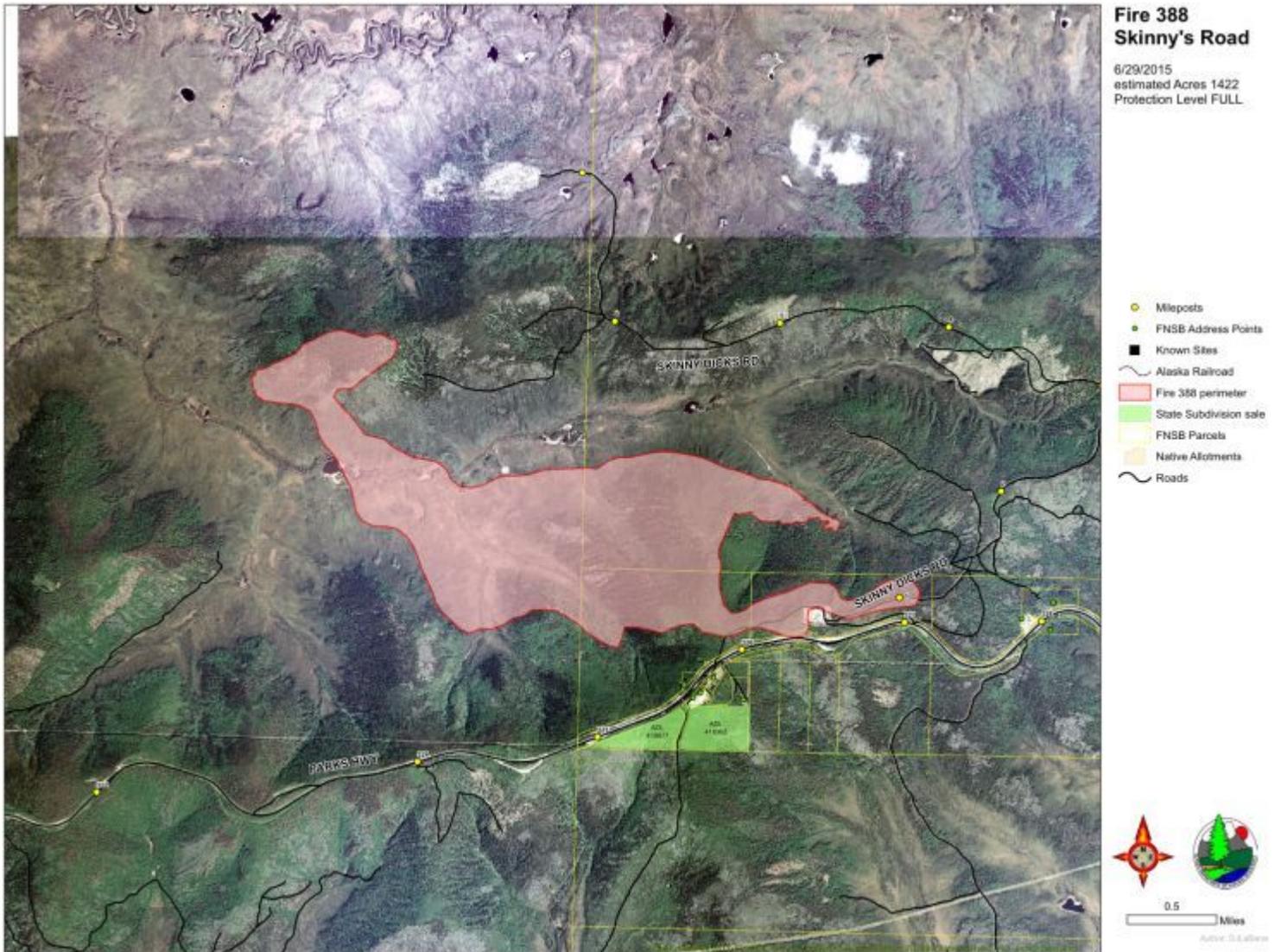
Update: 10 a.m. Friday: This morning the Alaska Division of Forestry estimated the Skinny's Road Fire covers 1,400 acres. According to this morning's situation report, single tree torching and smoldering were observed this morning, symptoms of a fire that is not fast-moving.

As of this morning, pilot cars were still shuttling vehicles through the 27-mile fire area. The pilot car operation was causing delays of up to 30 minutes, said Alaska Division of Forestry spokesman Pete Buist.

June 29, 2013

Skinny's road perimeter

Photo courtesy of the Alaska Division of Forestry | Posted: Saturday, June 29, 2013 2:32 pm



An Alaska Division of Forestry map shows the perimeter of the 1,400 acre Skinny's Road fire Saturday June 29, 2013.

said. Contrary to several rumors on Facebook, Skinny Dick's Halfway Inn, the roadhouse at 328 Mile, has not burned down, he said.

On Friday evening, the Alaska Department of Transportation condensed a section of the highway that must be led by a pilot car from 27 miles to the 10 miles between 322 Mile and 332 Mile. Delays of as much as 20 minutes are expected, department spokeswoman Hannah Blankenship said.

The Skinny's Road Fire began Tuesday evening and first caused closures on the Parks Highway after it escaped containment lines Wednesday evening. It's generally spread to the south and to the east and was the subject of a burnout operation between the Parks Highway and the fire's eastern flank, Buist said.

It is classified as a human-caused fire, which means it was not caused by lightning. In general, Friday was a good day for fire suppression with advancement toward containment on several Fairbanks-area fires, including the Kanuti Fire on Chena Hot Springs Road and the Old Valdez Trail Fire near Harding Lake, Buist said. There's been some recent growth on the 500-acre Stuart Creek 2 Fire north of Salcha, which might send some smoke into the Salcha area, he said.

Statewide, there were 118 active wildfires as of Friday, according to the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center.

Contact staff writer Sam Friedman at 459-7545. Follow him on Twitter, @FDNMcrime.

June 30, 2013

Travel still restricted as crews work on Skinny's Road wildfire

Posted: Sunday, June 30, 2013 4:58 pm | Updated: 4:37 pm, Tue Jul 23, 2013.

Travel still restricted as crews work on Skinny's Road wildfire Rod Boyce/rboyce@newsminer.com

FAIRBANKS—More than 250 fire personnel continue working Sunday on the Skinny's Road fire, which hasn't increased much in size but remains a challenge for crews.

"It's going well, but it's still a fragile situation," said fire information officer Brian Ballou, part of a fire management team from Oregon that assumed control of the fire Sunday morning.

"It's extremely dry, and the way that the fire burned, it didn't burn everything," he said, "so the potential is strong for having torching and reburning inside the fire lines."

Renewed activity inside the fire lines could allow the blaze to jump the lines as it throws up embers, Ballou said.

The fire, which started on Tuesday and was burning between Fairbanks and Nenana, was listed at 1,422 acres Sunday and 40 percent contained. Crews continued building fire lines overnight Saturday.

The fire is listed as being caused by a person, but the specific action that caused the fire has not been stated.

Pilot cars have been in use from milepost 332 to milepost 322 to guide traffic through the fire zone from 6 a.m. to midnight. Traffic can proceed without pilot cars from midnight to 6 a.m.

The use of pilot cars is likely to continue for a few more days, Ballou said, but fire managers regularly evaluate the situation in hopes of ending the need for the traffic disruption.

"There's just enough heavy fire traffic — a lot of engines running back and forth — plus we still do have some fire line to finish, and the possibility still exists that we could get a large amount of smoke in short bit of time," Ballou said.

"It's really a safety issue for both the public and the firefighters," he said.

Elsewhere, activity on the Stuart Creek 2 fire increased markedly this weekend, sending more smoke into some of the Fairbanks area. The human-caused fire, now at 2,000 acres, started June 19 and is burning on military land.

"That is in the far upper reaches of the south fork of the Chena, so in theory it could hit Chena Hot Springs Road, so we're using both water with CL-215 aircraft and retardant," fire information officer Pete Buist said.

Ground personnel are not being used much on the Stuart fire because it is on a military training range.

Contact managing editor Rod Boyce at 459-7585. Follow him on Twitter: @FDNMeditor

Fairbanks NEWMINER articles

July 3, 2013

Stuart Creek 2 Fire

photo by Marwan Wartes | Posted: Wednesday, July 3, 2013 8:57 pm



The Stuart Creek 2 Fire is seen from Alaska Airlines flight #145 on Tuesday night, July 2, 2013.

Fairbanks NEWSMINER articles

July 8, 2013

Stuart Creek 2 Fire

Sam Harrel/News-Miner | Posted: Monday, July 8, 2013 9:49 pm



The Stuart Creek 2 Fire burns the hillside on the south side of the Chena River near the Grange Hall Road, right, Monday evening, July 8, 2013. Despite making a run to the river Sunday, the fire remains on the south side of the river.

July 11, 2013

Stuart Creek 2 Fire

Sam Harrel/News-Miner | Posted: Thursday, July 11, 2013 9:23 pm



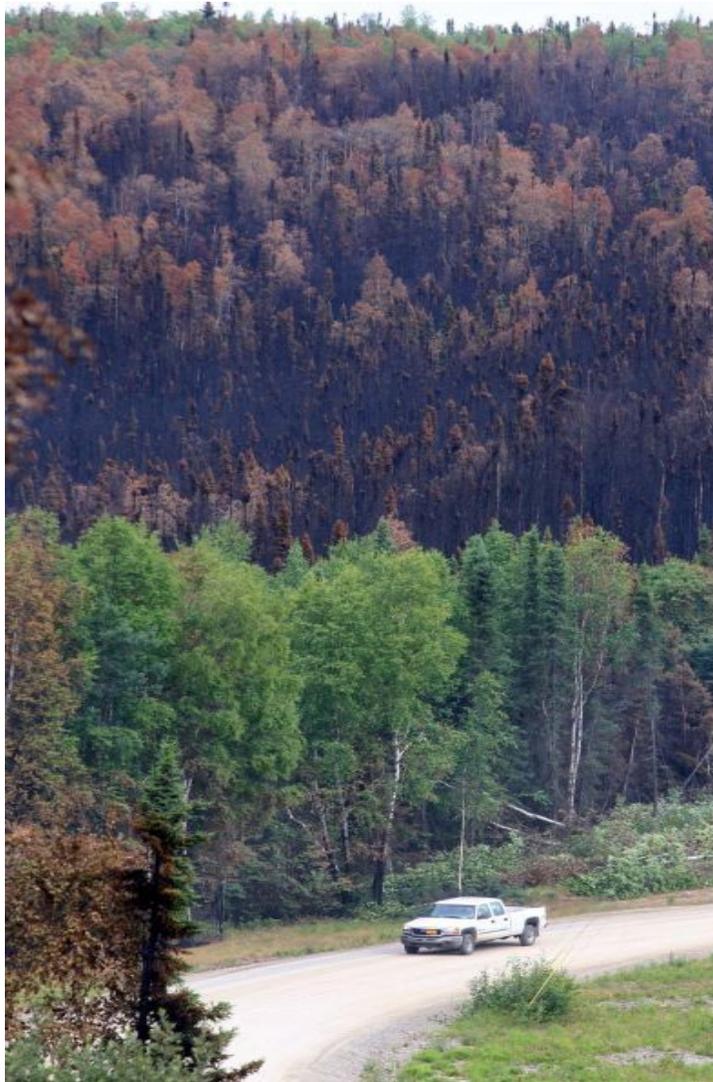
Firefighters mop up hot spots along a dozer line off Quarry Road, a part of the containment line for the Stuart Creek 2 Fire, on Thursday, July 11, 2013. They were pulling the berm apart left by the dozer to put out all of the hot spots. All of the hot spots have to be out for 300 feet into the burned area along the line before it can be considered a containment line.

July 11, 2013

Stuart Creek 2 Fire

Sam Harrel/News-Miner | Posted: Thursday, July 11, 2013 9:21 pm

A fire crew truck drives along Quarry Road, a part of the containment line for the Stuart Creek 2 Fire, on Thursday, July 11, 2013. Crews have been taking advantage of the recent rainy weather to reinforce lines to protect, Eielson Air Force Base, Moose Creek, Two Rivers and Pleasant Valley.



July 14, 2013

Stuart Creek fire lines still holding

Posted: Sunday, July 14, 2013 9:45 am | Updated: 4:36 pm, Tue Jul 23, 2013.

Stuart Creek fire lines still holding Tim Mowry/tmowry@newsminer.com

FAIRBANKS — So far, so good.

That was the word Saturday from wildfire officials on Saturday regarding the 84,000-acre Stuart Creek 2 Fire about 30 miles east of Fairbanks near the community of Two Rivers. Despite temperatures that rose into the 80s for the second straight day in Fairbanks, the miles of fire lines that hundreds of firefighters have been building around the wildfire in recent days were holding and officials were optimistic they would continue to do so.

“It’s pretty quiet, which is a good thing,” fire information officer Mary Hules with the Alaska Fire Service said on Saturday afternoon.

As they have been doing so for the past several days, the almost 800 firefighters battling the fire that forced the evacuation of dozens of residents along Chena Hot Springs Road a week ago continued to work on building a fire line around the north and northwest perimeters of the fire closest to the community of Pleasant Valley at 25 Mile Chena Hot Springs Road.

Before Saturday, firefighters still had about 40 miles of line to build to encircle the entire fire, information officer Joe Anderson with the AFS said. The fire still was listed as 28 percent contained.

“They’re making great progress,” Anderson said. “It is dense in there, so it’s a slow-moving process.”

On Saturday, three water-scooping aircraft were being used to drop water at strategic points along the fire’s edge where firefighters were constructing line “so they can get in there and aggressively put out the fire,” Hules said.

The warmer, drier weather was serving as “a good test” for the newly constructed fire lines, Anderson said. Fire activity increased Friday as a result of the warm, dry weather, but growth around the fire perimeter was minimal, the AFS reported.

There still were pockets of fuels burning in the interior of the fire and officials hope the fire will burn itself out once the fire line is complete around it.

“It’s just kind of yawning right now, but it’s still cooking,” Anderson said of the fire. “It doesn’t take much to get it cooking more.”

Temperatures are expected to climb into the low 80s again today before beginning to cool off slightly heading into the work week, said meteorologist Scott Berg with the National Weather Service in Fairbanks.

“We are looking for more clouds and cooler temperatures as we head into the week,” he said. “We’ll see cooler temperatures with highs into the 70s and lows in the upper 40s and lower 50s.”

The clouds will bring a chance for some afternoon thunderstorms and maybe some isolated showers, but there is no significant precipitation in the forecast, Berg said.

As of Saturday, there were still 75 active fires burning in Alaska but only four of them — Stuart Creek 2, Skinny’s Road, Tetlin Junction Ridge and Moon Lake — were being fought, according to the AFS website.

The Moon Lake Fire near Tok still had more than 300 firefighters working on it as of Friday, but many of those were being demobilized this weekend to prepare for future assignments. The Moon Lake Fire is one of six fires, along with the Tetlin Junction Ridge Fire, that is part of the Moon Lake Complex that have burned a total of almost 50,000 acres since June 20. Crews also were preparing to demobilize from the 6,700-acre Tetlin Junction Ridge Fire, which still had 73 firefighters working on it Friday.

While rain and cooler weather last week helped firefighters make good headway on the fires that are burning, there is potential for new fires to pop up with the warmer, drier weather, Anderson said.

“If we have thunderstorms again, they’re going to kick up again,” he said. “I don’t think (the fire season) is over with.”

Contact staff writer Tim Mowry at 459-7587.

Alaska Wildfire Numbers

Total fires to date: 451

Total estimated acreage burned: 1,049,173

Active fires as of Saturday: 75

Number of fires being fought: 4

July 18, 2013

Weather expected to aid Stuart Creek fire crews

Posted: Thursday, July 18, 2013 6:44 pm | Updated: 4:36 pm, Tue Jul 23, 2013.

Weather expected to aid Stuart Creek fire crews [Staff report/newsroom@newsminer.com](mailto:Staff_report/newsroom@newsminer.com)

FAIRBANKS—Rain and scattered showers were expected Thursday night to help crews battle the Stuart Creek 2 Fire near Chena Hot Springs Road, according to the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center.

Crews continued to cut containment lines Wednesday and Thursday, receiving help from lower temperatures and cloudier skies than in recent days.

Firefighters spent most of their time focusing on the western and northwestern borders of the fire as well as on two spot fires that jumped the South Fork of the Chena River.

The smaller of the two, at 30 acres, has been contained, according to the AICC. The larger spot fire, at 100 acres, was 75 percent contained as of Thursday as crews continued to build containment lines.

Some isolated parts of the fire's interior might still flare up, but the wetter weather forecast was expected to moderate the fire's growth.

An Alaska Incident Management Team assumed control Wednesday of the 628 people fighting the fire after the departure of the national Type I team.

An evacuation watch is still in effect along Chena Hot Springs Road from milepost 27 to 39. The Road itself is open. The Chena River State Recreation Area is still closed between mileposts 26 and 51.

Contact the newsroom at 459-7572.

August 1, 2013

Murkowski seeks investigation into Stuart Creek 2 Fire

Posted: Thursday, August 1, 2013 1:15 pm | Updated: 1:57 pm, Fri Aug 2, 2013.

Murkowski seeks investigation into Stuart Creek 2 Fire Sam Friedman / sfriedman@newsminer.com

FAIRBANKS—U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski asked the U.S. Army on Thursday to review the cause of the Stuart Creek 2 Fire and to report to Congress about future procedures for determining whether to hold weapons training on days with high risk of wildfire.

Murkowski, a member of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, added language to the military budget expressing concern that the military held artillery training despite being advised of high fire danger from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, according to a news release from Murkowski's office.

The language in the budget legislation directs the Army to report to congressional defense committees by April 2014.

The 85,000-acre Stuart Creek 2 Fire is "believed to have started" from a live-fire artillery exercise on June 19, Murkowski's news release says. The Army and the Alaska Fire Service officially list the cause of the fire as still under investigation. Fort Wainwright Garrison commander Col. Ron Johnson told an audience of Two Rivers and Pleasant Valley residents in July that the Army exercises caused the fire.

Fire crews are now in mop-up mode for the 85,000-acre fire, which has cost more than \$19.8 million to fight, according the Alaska Fire Service. The fire led to evacuations in the communities of Pleasant Valley and Two Rivers during a week of hot weather in July when winds drove the fire north.

Contact staff writer Sam Friedman at 459-7545. Follow him on Twitter: @FDNMcrime.

August 16, 2013

Fairbanks got heavy rain, but little fell on fires to the east

Posted: Friday, August 16, 2013 10:13 am | Updated: 11:39 am, Fri Aug 16, 2013.

Fairbanks got heavy rain, but little fell on fires to the east Tim Mowry tmowry@newsminer.com

FAIRBANKS - Fairbanks received its biggest rainfall in almost a month on Thursday but it wasn't nearly enough to douse any of the fires burning in the eastern and central Interior. Almost four-tenths of an inch of rain was reported at the Fairbanks International Airport as of midnight Thursday. Officially, the total rainfall measured 0.37 of an inch, meteorologist Jim Brader at the National Weather Service said.

However, the precipitation was centered mostly over the Fairbanks urban area and didn't have a major impact on wildfires burning south and east of the city, fire information officer Trish Hogervorst with the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center said.

"It's a mixed bag," she said. "A lot of them got a shower here and there but the further east you go the drier it stayed."

Only 0.05 of an inch of rain was reported at Eielson Air Force Base and Chena Hot Springs reported just 0.14 of an inch of rain.

The one fire that did benefit from the rain was the 25,000-acre Birch Creek Fire burning near Circle Hot Springs, Vogerhorst said.

"They don't expect much fire spread today because they did get a couple showers on that fire," she said.

However, an automated weather station near the 58,000-acre Mississippi Fire burning southeast of Fairbanks near Delta Junction reported only 0.03 of an inch of rain, Brader said.

"They got one little shower that lasted five minutes on the Mississippi Fire," Vogerhorst said. Likewise, the 88,000-acre Stuart Creek 2 Fire 25 miles east of Fairbanks didn't get much rain and neither did the 1,500-acre Caribou Creek Fire burning north of the Salcha River, Vogerhorst said.

However, the high humidity and cooler temperatures associated with the rain should prevent fires from spreading and give firefighters a chance to go on the offensive, Vogerhorst said.

More rain is expected in the eastern Interior this weekend and early next week that could bring an end to what has been a longer-than-normal fire season, Brader said.

"We are expecting the season-ending rain next week," he said.

At least one-half inch of rain is expected to fall east of Delta Saturday night and Sunday, and another storm will be moving into the Tanana Valley from the west on Monday night and Tuesday, he said.

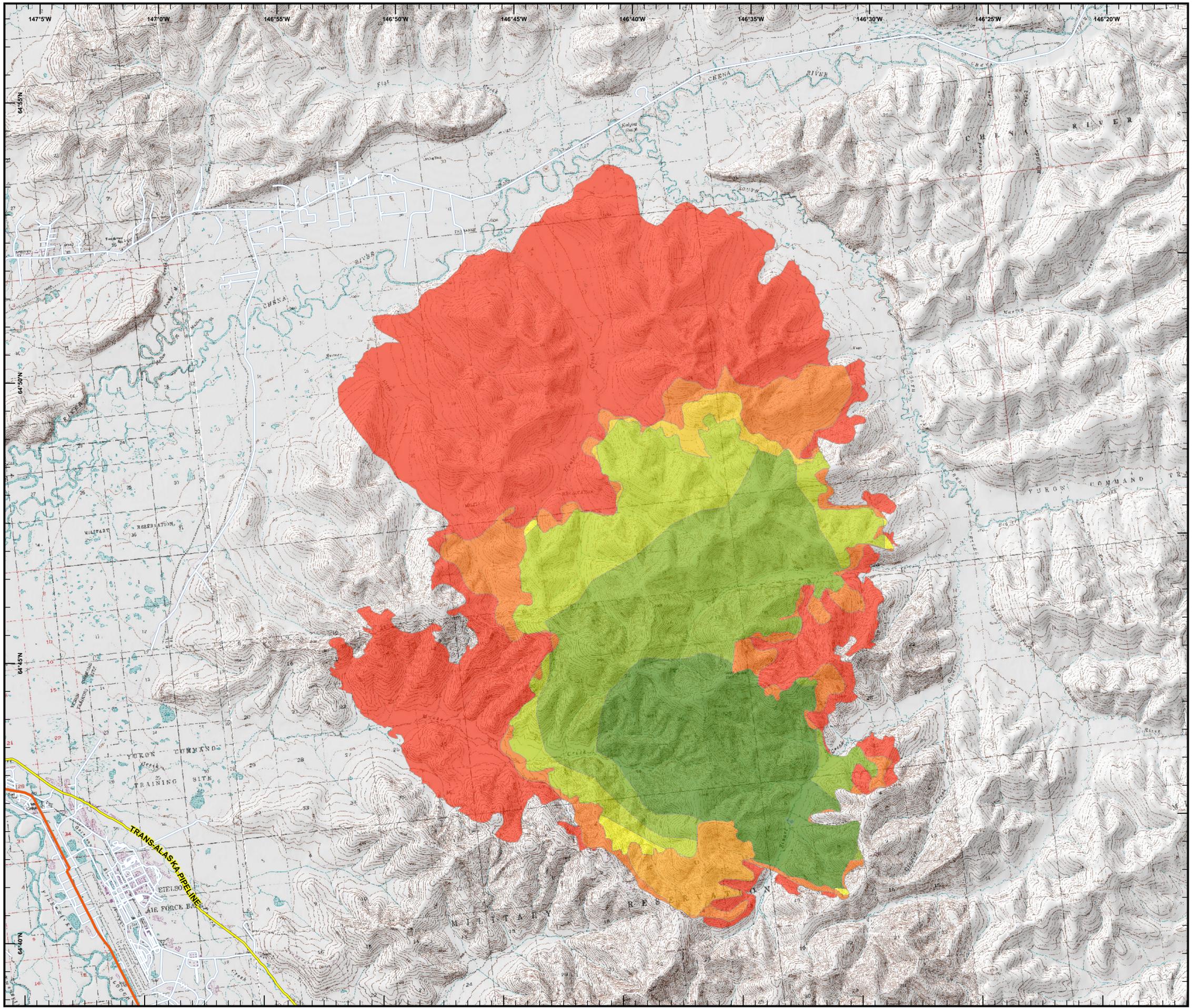
“It looks like a substantial rain, a half inch or more, and we’ll be staying in a cool, wet regime for the rest of the week,” he said.

Before Thursday’s rainfall, only 0.01 inches of rain had fallen at the airport this month, which is normally the wettest month of the year in Fairbanks.

In addition to much-needed moisture, cooler temperatures are also aiding firefighters. The temperature in Fairbanks failed to hit 70 degrees for the second day in a row on Thursday, ending what had been a string of 23 days in a row of when the temperature hit at least 70 at the airport until Tuesday.

Taking advantage of the wetter, cooler conditions, firefighters on Thursday conducted a burnout on the Mississippi Fire to prevent the fire from moving northeast toward the Tanana River and the community of Whitestone Farms. Firefighters burned the area west of a dozer line that was constructed from Whitestone Farms west to the fire’s northern edge. The fire was still 1 1/2 miles away from the Tanana River at its closest point.

Contact staff writer Tim Mowry at 459-7587. Follow him on Twitter: @FDNMoutdoors.



Fire Progression

280 - Stuart Creek 2 - HK8H
7/8/2013 0245 hrs



- Trans-Alaska Pipeline
- Highway
- Local Road
- Minor Road

Date	Daily Ac	Total Ac
2013-06-20	6	6
2013-06-26	9847	9854
2013-07-01	12417	22270
2013-07-02	8145	30415
2013-07-03	360	30776
2013-07-04	956	31731
2013-07-05	1846	33577
2013-07-06	6671	40248
2013-07-08	38852	79100

