

Kenai Peninsula Borough
Office of the Borough Mayor

MEMORANDUM

TO: Assembly President
Members, Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly

FROM: Charlie Pierce, Mayor *JCB*
Kelly Cooper, Assembly Member *(B) for K.C.*
Norm Blakeley, Assembly Member *(B) for N.B.*

DATE: October 10, 2019

RE: Resolution 2019-054, Requesting Public Land Managers to Take Reasonable Actions to Prevent, Limit and Mitigate Wildfires and their Impacts on the Kenai Peninsula (Mayor, Cooper, Blakeley)

The Swan Lake fire began on June 5, 2019, in a remote area of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge ignited by lightning. This fire ultimately grew to 167,164 acres.¹ Initially the area was classified as a Limited Protection Zone under the Interagency Fire Management Plans for Alaska due to the low values at risk and costly or difficult suppression efforts. Fire managers monitored it and as it grew, suppression efforts were implemented to protect important infrastructure. In mid-June heavy smoke triggered a temporary closure on Sterling Highway and contributed to an air quality advisory being issued.

As the fire continued to burn during the unusually hot and dry summer, dense smoke continued to spread, impacting Cooper Landing, Seward, Sterling and other areas throughout the borough. A number of rainfalls in the second half of July greatly diminished fire activity, stopped the fire's growth and fire response staffing was reduced. A wind storm in mid-August, with velocities exceeding 35 mph, caused the fire to reignite and grow by 50,000 acres in the next week, crossing the Seward Highway and threatening Cooper Landing and later Sterling. For weeks the smoke continued to heavily impact these communities as well the rest of the Borough. The fire and smoke also caused many blockages of the Sterling Highway, which is the sole highway access from the east side of the Kenai Peninsula to Cooper Landing and the west side. This was during the tourist season causing substantial health and safety concerns and economic losses.

This resolution requests that the managers of our public lands take reasonable proactive steps to prevent and mitigate wildfires and their impacts in the Kenai Peninsula Borough to prevent similar events from occurring in the future. Such steps would include reducing forest fuels, proactive cutting of trails for firefighter access, consider retaining more firefighting staff and equipment especially aircraft assets in Alaska and providing opportunities for the public to assist in these efforts.

¹ To get an accurate account of actions from the start date, please reference the official timeline of record online at <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/6387/>