



Alaska Department of Fish and Game Updates

Alphabet Hills Prescribed Burn

Project Summary

In cooperation with DNR Division of Forestry and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Glennallen Field Office, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) plans to burn acreage in the vicinity of the Alphabet Hills for wildlife habitat enhancement. This project totals approximately 53,000 acres over three units. We expect 2020 will be the first year that implementation may begin, recognizing that completion may take several years. ADF&G supports this project with a federal aid grant secured through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program that designates an excise tax on firearms and ammunition collected under the Pittman-Robertson Act to fund state wildlife agencies.

Background

Fire suppression and limited fire occurrence across portions of Alaska has resulted in late successional forests, providing limited forage opportunities for moose. Fire returns the landscape to an early successional stage and encourages the regeneration of browse species such as willow, aspen, and birch, which are important to moose, grouse, and furbearers. Moose browse availability has been shown to increase substantially after fire. Therefore, prescribed fire has become an important management tool for increasing the capacity of landscapes to support more moose and increase harvest opportunity.

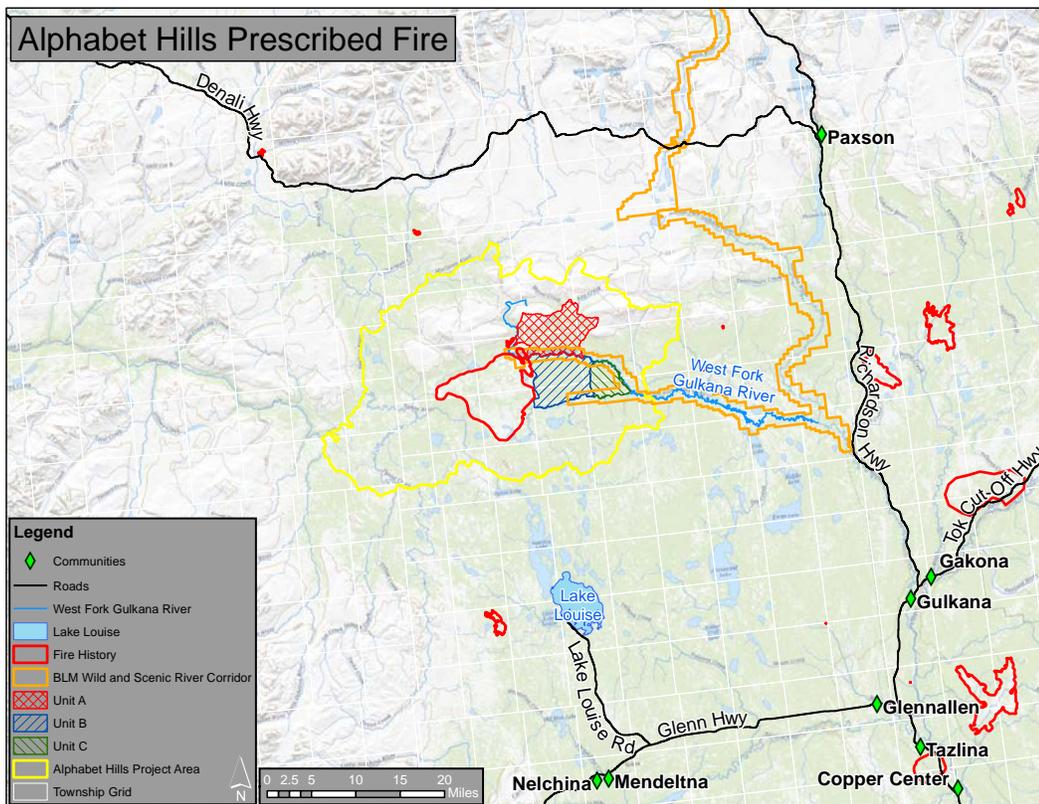
A portion of GMU 13B near the Alphabet Hills was burned in 2003 and 2004 during a prescribed fire operation, encompassing 5,000 and 38,000 acres, respectively. The value of the planned prescribed burn scheduled for 2020 will be enhanced by ADF&G's corresponding study of moose habitat, movements, nutrition, and densities within the burn area. These combined studies will allow ADF&G to establish a baseline in this area for understanding the relationship between fire, moose habitat, and moose movement to better inform land and game management decisions.

Project Objective

The objective for this burn is to enhance browse quality and quantity for moose. The target is an uneven burn, with high and moderate severities across the units. This mosaic burn pattern will enhance age diversity of shrubs and trees by triggering dormant seeds to sprout at different rates. Post-burn regeneration of willow, aspen and birch is expected to greatly improve browse conditions for moose for many years. Further, discontinuity in the fuels after burning the proposed units will reduce the potential for large-scale wildfires. By restoring habitat for moose, hunting opportunities will likely be expanded, although it may take some time for a moose population level response to occur as this area is known for its slow growth of vegetation.

Project Site

The Alphabet Hills prescribed burn units are situated along the South and North Branches of the West Fork Gulkana River, overlapping the Wild and Scenic River Corridor, managed by the BLM. Lake Louise is 28 miles south; Glennallen is 56 miles southeast; Denali Highway is 20 miles north; and Glenn Highway is 30 miles south. The three burn units (A, B, and C) totaling 53,590 acres are situated within the 463,000 acre project area. The burn units are the focus of the project; prescribed fires are managed with contingency plans to expand decision making options when changing weather conditions arise. The burn units are directly adjacent to the 38,000 acres that burned in 2004, as shown on the map below.



The planned prescribed fire is situated between the Alphabet Hills and the lake-filled lowlands north of Lake Louise. Few natural ignitions have resulted in wildfires here since 1946. The 2004 prescribed fire directly west of the new project was the largest fire in the region. It was lit under very dry conditions required for a landscape scale burn to occur in this area. The other historical fire perimeters depicted on this map were wildfires from human and natural starts over the last 75 years.

Land Manager Coordination

ADF&G is coordinating with the BLM Glennallen Field Office & Alaska Fire Service, and State Forestry to conduct an environmental review, provide project information to the communities and land owners in the area, and prepare the implementation plan for conducting this burn in 2020. In advance of the burn, ADF&G has measured plant species composition, nutritional quality, and biomass of preferred browse species in the prescribed burn units. Post-fire, ADF&G will map burn severity and monitor moose activity relative to the burn area.

ADF&G Contacts

Project coordinator:	Sue Rodman	267-2274	sue.rodman@alaska.gov
Glennallen Area Biologist:	Heidi Hatcher	822-3461	heidi.hatcher@alaska.gov
Research Biologist:	Kim Jones	861-2110	kim.jones@alaska.gov
Region IV Supervisor:	Gino DelFrate	861-21223	gino.delfrate@alaska.gov

