

HOW WE MANAGE WILDLAND FIRES



Grade Level: 5-12

Alaska State Content Standards: GeoE5, GeoF3, GovG3

Subject: Geography, Government

Skills: Application, Comparison, Description

Duration: 1 class period

Group Size: 4

Setting: indoors

Vocabulary: Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan, critical management option, full management option, modified management option, limited management option.

OBJECTIVE

Students will be able to explain how Wildland fires are managed in Alaska based on the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan.

TEACHING STRATEGY

Students will choose appropriate priorities for management under given fire scenarios.

MATERIALS

- How We Manage Fires scenario cards

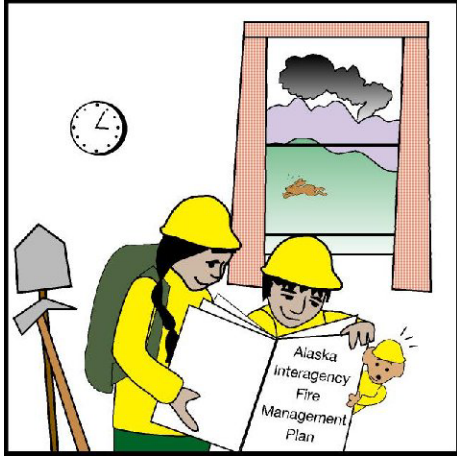
TEACHER BACKGROUND

Managers have to make difficult decisions when fire suppression resources are in short supply. They

must prioritize fires and associated costs even if a fire is in a management option dictating immediate suppression.

Fire Management Options

Lands are divided into four fire protection categories or Management Options based on the resource values to be protected, as determined by the respective landowners and managers. When fires do occur, the Alaska Fire Service (sponsored by USBLM), ADNR Division of Forestry, and USFS are jointly responsible for providing suppression services. The four categories include:



1. **Critical Management Option** - This category is assigned to lands where human lives and property require that immediate, top priority fire protection be provided. Fires on these lands will be given unquestioned priority in the allocation of fire fighting funds, manpower, and equipment. Fires will be immediately and aggressively suppressed.
2. **Full Management Option** - Areas in this category include lands with high cultural or historical values or other resource values that landowners or managers determine to need fire protection. These lands are generally uninhabited. On lands classified for full protection, all fires will be aggressively fought throughout the fire season.
3. **Modified Management Option** - This category can serve as a buffer area between Full Protection and Limited Action areas. It includes lands where fire protection is needed during critical burning periods (unusually dry months), but where fires are otherwise desirable. On these sites, immediate fire-fighting action is taken if conditions indicate

that a large fire could occur (generally during the first and drier part of each fire season). If the fire cannot be contained the first day, an escaped fire situation analysis (EFSA) will be made to determine levels of continued action. When the danger is deemed low due to wetter conditions, no initial attack is made on new fire starts, and these lands are treated much like those in Limited Action areas. This generally occurs later in the fire season, historically after July.

4. **Limited Management Option** - This category recognizes those areas where a near natural fire regime is desirable, or where the resource values at risk are worth less than it would cost to launch a fire fighting effort. On these lands, fires are only monitored unless they threaten lands in other higher valued categories or critical sites within the area. Suppression action then will be taken if the responsible land management agency deems it necessary. Limited Action areas are usually found in the remote parts of the state, far removed from any human development.

These fire plans are followed whenever possible. During severely dry years there may be so many fires that not all can be fought at their designated level due to lack of manpower or funding.

PROCEDURE

1. Review that areas of the state are managed for wildfires differently. Discuss why. See the Teacher Background section for more information.

2. Explain to the students that they will be working in teams of 4 to prioritize wildfire scenario cards. The team must decide which wildfire scenarios should receive the highest priority – where should those limited suppression resources be sent? Refer to the Teacher Background section for more information.
3. Divide the class into teams of 4. Give each team a set of scenario cards and have them prioritize the cards from highest to lowest suppression priority.
4. Have groups compare their answers and discuss.

EVALUATION

Use steps 3 and 4 in the procedure section as the evaluation.

How We Manage Wildland Fires

Scenario Cards

Scenario 1

A wildfire has begun 50 miles northwest of Fairbanks. The area burned in 10 years. The last month has been very wet with frequent thunderstorms. There are no villages or historic sites within a 30 mile radius.

Scenario 2

A low intensity surface fire is burning in a remote area. The only property at risk is a single cabin about 5 miles from the fire. It is not inhabited and hasn't been for years, although it is privately owned.

Scenario 3

A high intensity wildfire is burning in the tundra. There are no cabins, historic sites, forests, or villages within a hundred mile radius. The weather has been warm and dry, but rains are predicted within the week.

Scenario 4

A wildfire is burning 5 miles west of a heavily forested area considered to be commercially valuable, but which is not slated for harvest any time soon.

Scenario 5

A wildfire has begun 3 miles east of Niniichik in bug-killed spruce. The last 2 months have been extremely hot and dry. Erratic thunderstorm winds are predicted.

Scenario 6

A high intensity tundra fire is burning 20 miles east of Nome.

Scenario 7

A wildfire of extreme intensity is burning 30 miles south of Kiatuk. The fire is very close to an area that is presently uninhabited, but contains fish site cabins used every July by those living in Kiatuk.