

# 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

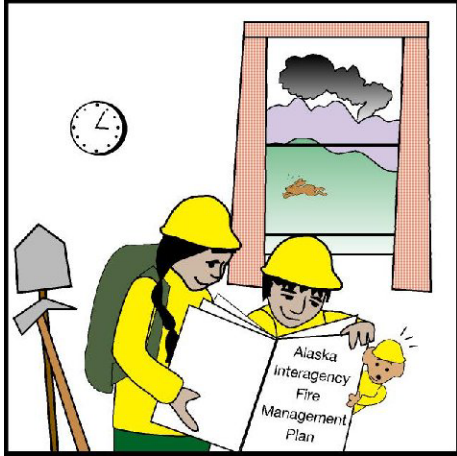
## TEACHER BACKGROUND

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.