

400 Village Men Battling Large Fires In Alaska's Interior

Many younger men from Interior villages were unable to get to Fairbanks for the Golden Days celebration and Eskimo Olympics competition this year.

Almost 400 village men from Anaktuvuk Pass to Bethel and Unalakleet were hired on as BLM emergency

firefighters to battle large fires in eastern parts of the state.

As of today almost 45,000 acres of forest in the Tetlin and Chicken areas are fire-blackened, and the fires are continuing to spread in hot, dry weather.

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Battling Fire . . .

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Nine villages sent men aboard BLM helicopters to battle the fire 15 miles northeast of Tetlin. For days now emergency firefighters and regular BLM and state men have been working feverishly in the fire zones, trying to get it under control.

A weather front is presently holding steady in the area today, raising the humidity and dampening flames a bit, according to the Bureau of Land Management here.

Another fire, 15 miles south of Chicken, is still reported out of control and now well past 20,000 acres in size.

Three hundred and thirty-eight village men were hired out of Interior villages to battle the forest fires. Bethel, Unalakleet, Eck, Noorvik, Kinana, Minto, Tanacross, Tetlin, Fort Yukon, Tanana, Anaktuvuk Pass, Venetie and McGrath all sent men to the fires.

When forest fires get out of control in remote areas, BLM officials order helicopters into villages to hire, on the spot, as many able-bodied men as can be mustered.

The dirty, dangerous work is often the only cash employment available to residents in many remote Alaska communities. Wages vary from \$3.07 an hour for unskilled men to over \$4.00 an hour.