

Tundra Fires Still Burning Out of Control Up North

Twenty-five tundra fires still burned out of control in northern Alaska as this issue of the Tundra Times went to press. Bureau of Land Management spokesman Kerry Cartier said although no villages are presently in danger, firefighting conditions continue to be erratic and unpredictable.

Several rural communities that were either preparing for evacuation or were not visible from the air due to smoke cover last week, are breathing a little easier this week. Although more than 1,600,000 acres are ablaze, several critical fires have improved.

--A fire that has taunted the

village of Shungnak for more than a week lingers on but poses no immediate threat to the village;

--The Big Salt River fire, which has been moving steadily toward the trans-Alaska pipeline is now reported to be "62 per cent contained." However, it

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still has the biggest crew of all the manned fires burning in the Fairbanks District, even though the BLM has not listed it among the top priority fires;

-A fire near Buckland has a crew of only 18, but apparently does not pose an immediate threat.

More than 1,100 firefighters were on the lines at last report, but BLM expected some cutback in the near future as college students working on the crews prepared to leave for school.

Some fires were hit by brief rain showers, a welcome respite during a summer in which rainfall has been up to 90 per cent less than usual.

Although at least one enormous fire was reported out of the Anchorage District of the BLM, Cartier said most of the personnel and equipment was in use in the northern district.

A chart kept by the BLM since the first fire started July 7 paints an incredible picture of "fire-busts" breaking out across the tundra every week since then. During one week, 40 new lightening fires were reported in one day; the following day, 27 new fires broke out.

Cartier said fire supervisors had high praise for this years crews, some of whom are working under difficult circumstances at best.

No estimates have yet been

made of the damage to land resources as a result of the big burns.