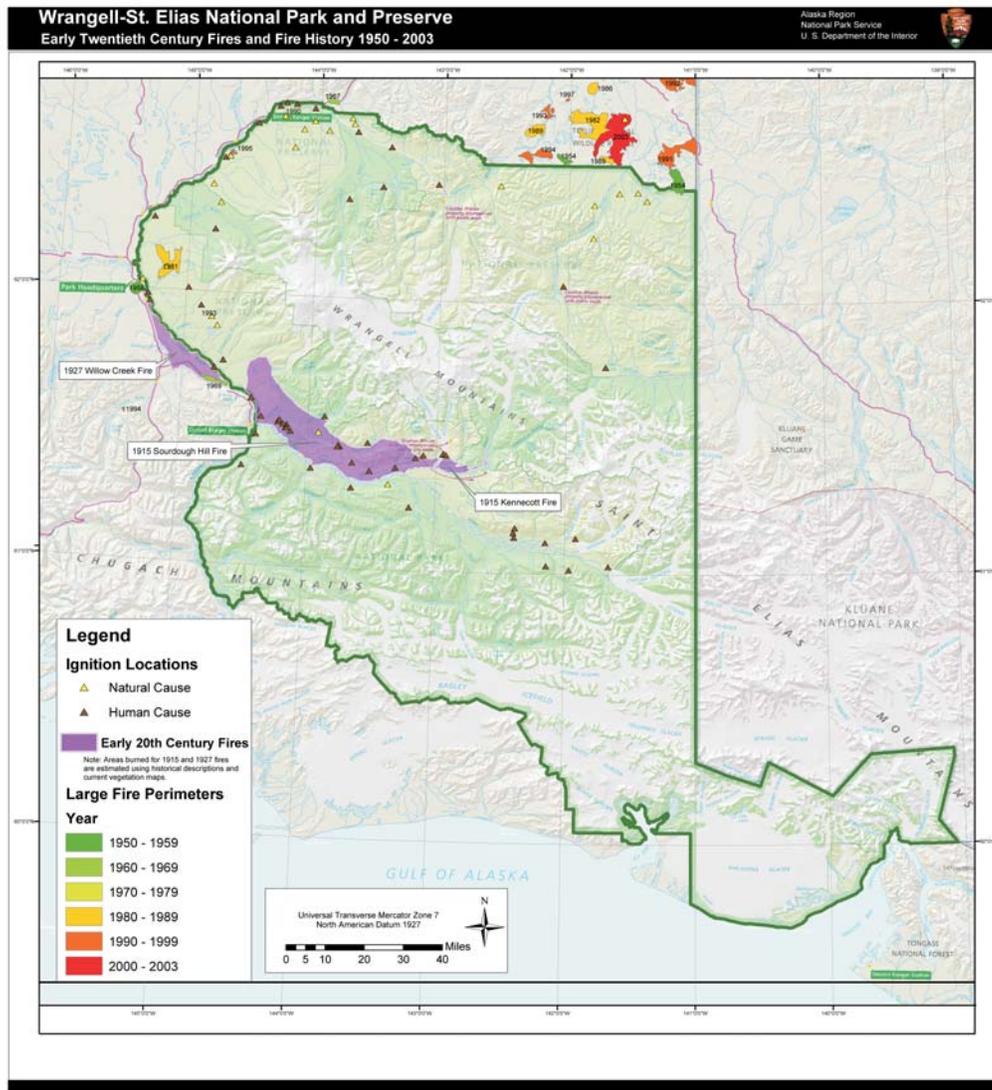


Fire History in the Copper River Basin

Alaska National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Program



Alaskan plant and animal diversity in part results from fire occurrence on the landscape. What at first looks like devastation soon blooms into a panorama of life.



1915 Sourdough Hill Fire

Presumably set by sparks from the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad, burned from Chitina to the Kennicott River and from the Chitina River to the mountains on the north; 384,000 acres were burned.

Lutz, H.J. 1956. Ecological Effects of Forest Fires in the Interior of Alaska. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Technical Bulletin No. 1133.

1915 Kennecott Fire

Presumably set on a windy day by one man using oil-soaked rags, burned all the timbered country between the Kennicott and Nizina Rivers. This fire was reportedly set to kill the timber so as to provide fuelwood for sale at the Kennecott mine, about 64,000 acres were burned.

Lutz, H.J. 1956. Ecological Effects of Forest Fires in the Interior of Alaska. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Technical Bulletin No. 1133.

1927 Willow Creek Fire

Started by construction crews. Burned between the Copper River and Tonsina River with the Richardson Highway as the western boundary. Area burned 128,000 acres.

Lutz, H.J. 1956. Ecological Effects of Forest Fires in the Interior of Alaska. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Technical Bulletin No. 1133.

Succession Process after Fire

Herb Stage (0-5 years)

Fire, having burned the forest, restores minerals to the soil in the form of ash. Herbs (wildflowers, grasses, sedges), mosses and liverworts may grow from seeds and sprout from roots. Dead trees called snags may remain standing.

Shrub Stage (6-25 years)

Shrub and tree seedlings grow larger, shade grasses and offer good cover for many animals. Foods for wildlife including berries, seeds and buds are plentiful.

Young Forest Stage (26-50 years)

Aspen and willow create a dense forest canopy and shade the forest floor. Slowly spruce begin to grow.

Mature Forest Stage (51-150 years)

Mature aspen become less abundant as some die, opening the canopy for spruce to grow taller.

Over-Mature Forest Stage (150-300 years)

The forest is mostly spruce trees and the canopy is mostly open. There are dying and dead trees still standing which provide food and cover for some animals.

Post 1915 Sourdough Hill Fire

1916



Gilahina Trestle, McCarthy Road. 1916, bridge was rebuilt the fall after the fire in 1915. Photo courtesy of University of Washington, Special Collections, Uw9348

1999



Gilahina Trestle, McCarthy Road. 1999. Aspen in foreground and white spruce on top of the hill. Photo taken during an NPS historic landscape photo monitor project. Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.