



# INTERIOR WILDLAND FIRE

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## Kopshesut Fire News Release

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### Forecast Winds Could Bring Smoke From Kopshesut Fire Into Ambler as Weather Warms Up

**FAIRBANKS, Alaska** — Light westerly winds are predicted today and, if fire activity increases as temperatures rise, they could blow smoke into Ambler. Firefighters continue strengthening firelines in chilly conditions ahead of the expected warm-up to keep the Kopshesut Fire from moving closer to the village. Containment increased to 40% Monday, and the fire is still estimated at 1,447 acres, about one mile west of Ambler.

Crews reported temperatures around 35 degrees this morning after Monday's light snow and northerly winds — weather that has helped keep fire activity subdued while they secure the perimeter. Firefighters are extinguishing hot spots along the control line and will continue working up to 300 feet into the interior to put out remaining heat before declaring those sections contained.

This careful process, known as mop up, involves moving through the burned area to eliminate any heat pockets that could allow the fire to spread outside its perimeter. Firefighters look for smoldering areas in dry grass, moss, duff, or beneath fallen trees, then dig them out, cool them with water, and ensure the ground is cold to the touch. Fortunately, the fire is not burning deeply into the ground which is more common later in the summer when deeper layers dry out. Because heat is mostly confined to surface fuels such as dry grass and black spruce, firefighters can extinguish hotspots more efficiently.

With warmer and drier weather on the way and vegetation already extremely dry, conditions are expected to dry out again. As temperatures rise this week, crews anticipate the possibility of additional afternoon flare-ups as the fire burns through unburned pockets well inside the perimeter. The fire continues to burn in black spruce, mixed hardwoods, and tundra with tall grass, and is mostly creeping and smoldering.

There are now 56 personnel assigned to the Kopshesut Fire after 13 smokejumpers demobilized, leaving 11 smokejumpers, the Midnight Sun Hotshots, and the North Star Fire Crew to continue the work begun on Thursday. It remains the only staffed fire in Alaska.

With warmer weather ahead, Ambler residents may see more smoke from the fire, particularly from within the perimeter as lingering heat burns off in unburned pockets. This is normal and can continue even after the fire is considered contained and controlled. Contained and controlled means the fire is not expected to move outside the control lines that crews are reinforcing around the entire perimeter — a key goal firefighters are working toward.

**PREDICTED WEATHER** — High pressure building over the area today will bring mild temperatures, clear skies, and lower humidity. This afternoon, relative humidity will drop near critical levels, but light winds and temperatures in the 50s will help keep fire behavior moderate. On Wednesday, warmer air will move in and temperatures are expected to reach the 60s. Humidity levels will again be near critical, but conditions may improve in the evening as clouds begin to move into the region. Those clouds will help moderate humidity levels on Thursday, even as temperatures continue to rise.

**AIR QUALITY** — There is considerable concern about the noxious smoke produced by the burning material in the landfill where the fire began. Both wildfire smoke and smoke from burning trash contain fine particles and other pollutants that can be very harmful to people's health. These particles can irritate the eyes and lungs and are especially dangerous for Elders, young children, and people with heart or respiratory conditions. Even short-term exposure can worsen breathing problems. Smoke from the Kopshesut Fire has not significantly drifted into Ambler, but that could change with the westerly winds. Residents should stay alert to changing conditions and take steps to protect their health if smoke moves into the community. Find more air quality information at <https://dec.alaska.gov/air/anpms/wildfire-smoke/>