



Daily News-Miner

THE VOICE OF INTERIOR ALASKA SINCE 1903

Inside Today

Some cities raising minimum wages run into problems with enforcement. » A7

GOOD MORNING



The weather.

A little cooler today. Fog and rain in the morning developing into scattered showers. High today54 Low tonight 41

Sunrise: 5:20 a.m. Sunset: 10:29 p.m.

WEATHER » A11

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TOP CHEF

Raven Landing's best feature may be its food.

INTERIOR Page A6

...

BIG YEAR

Annual Alaskan reports best year ever.

INTERIOR Page A3

...



SUPER SENIORS

See photos from Saturday's Alaska International Senior Games action

SPORTS Page B1

...

WE'RE NO. 1

Alaska leads region in workplace health assessments.

HEALTH Page B6

...

SOURDOUGH JACK:

"Cowboy poker sounds like my kinda rodeo event — the kind where ya stay seated!"



Alaska fires hit 5 million acres

Season on pace to become second-worst on record

Staff Report NEWSROOM @NEWSMINER.COM

The 2015 Alaska fire season has hit the 5-million-acre mark and is likely on its way to becoming the second largest wildfire season on record.

Wildfires in the state passed the milestone on Friday, according to the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center, and stood

at 5,036,395 acres as of Sunday. A warm, dry June had Alaska on pace for its biggest wildfire season ever a month ago, but that trajectory was stalled by wet weather that began dampening much of the state in July.

Active personnel, which totaled more than 3,000 firefighters at the peak of the season, had dwindled to just 146 by Sunday. Nine of the 749 fires started this

summer in the Alaska remain staffed.

However, the season still will rank among the busiest for Alaska firefighters.

This summer's total is just 13,000 acres short of the acreage burned in 1957, which is the second biggest season ever recorded. The top wildfire season occurred in 2004, when 6.6 million acres burned.

Despite seasonal rain in much of the state, fires

remain active in drier parts of the western Interior, southwest Alaska and the Seward Peninsula.

The busiest area in the state is near Hughes, which "has seen very little relief at all this season," according to a post at www.akfireinfo.com, which provides updates on wildfire activity in the state. The 135,777-acre fire is staffed by 97 fire personnel, who are trying to

keep it from spreading to the Koyukuk River village. Across the river, the Isahultila Fire and Bakatigikh Fire have merged to burn from another direction.

Although Alaska firefighters remain active in parts of their home state, blazes in the Lower 48 could be drawing them south as early as today. Fire managers were expecting a request for five Type 2 Initial Attack Crews would be made during the weekend. Contact the newsroom at 459-7572.

Rare Fairbanks rodeo draws big crowd

By Jeff Richardson JRICHARDSON @NEWSMINER.COM

Even after traveling all the way from Guadalajara, Mexico, to rope a calf in Interior Alaska, Gilbert Perez couldn't help but shrug when asked about his long journey.

"I do cowboy rodeos, Mexican rodeos," he said while sipping from a can of Bud Light. "I just love rodeos."

It was a common sentiment at the Tanana Valley State Fair this weekend, where competitors traveled thousands of miles to compete in the Northernmost Rodeo in America. Alongside the Alaska-grown talent, participants arrived from rodeo hotbeds like Texas, Florida and Arizona to rope and ride.

It's the second consecutive year Rodeo Alaska has held an event at the fair, and the response has helped Fairbanks maintain its reputation for rodeo enthusiasm. Following a 15-year hiatus, Rodeo Alaska can still fill the bleachers with hundreds of cheering spectators.

"There were no rodeos here for a long time," said Tonya Brewer, a barrel racer from Anchorage, "but I think these are the biggest crowds in the state."

Rodeo Alaska promoter Frank Koloski said the atmosphere — and the word that travels among competitors — helps draw a strong field to Fairbanks.

"It's that power of that social media," he said. "It's not just the quality of the event, it's the quality of the crowd."

RODEO » A3



Tessa Bennion, riding Belle, performs with the Rebel Riders Trick Team during Rodeo Alaska at the Tanana Valley State Fair on Sunday. ERIN CORNELIUSSEN/NEWS-MINER PHOTOS

Following an elaborate opening ceremony on Sunday that saluted the U.S. Armed Forces, competitors took on a handful of events that included bull riding, team roping and breakaway roping. A similar slate of events was held Saturday, with the top finishers from the weekend earning a trip to state finals at the upcoming Alaska State Fair in Palmer.



Above: Catherine Robertson participates in mutton busting. Above left: A bull runs by the poker table during cowboy poker. Below left: Bulls wait to enter the arena.

Colorado mine just one of thousands filled with toxic runoff

By Nicholas Riccardi ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Beneath the western United States lie thousands of old mining tunnels filled with the same toxic stew that spilled into a Colorado river last week, turning it into a nauseating yellow concoction and stoking alarm about contamination of drinking water.

Though the spill into the Animas River in southern Colorado is unusual for its size, it's only the latest instance of the region grappling with the legacy of a centuries-old mining boom that helped populate the region but also left buried toxins.

Until the late 1970s there were no regulations on mining in most of the region, meaning anyone could dig a hole where they

Kim Cofman and her daughters Acacia, 12, left, and Cayenne, 14, try to stir up sludge from the Gold King Mine on the bottom of the Animas River on Saturday in Durango, Colorado. JERRY MCBRIDE/ THE DURANGO HERALD

liked and search for gold, silver, copper or zinc.

MINES » A5

