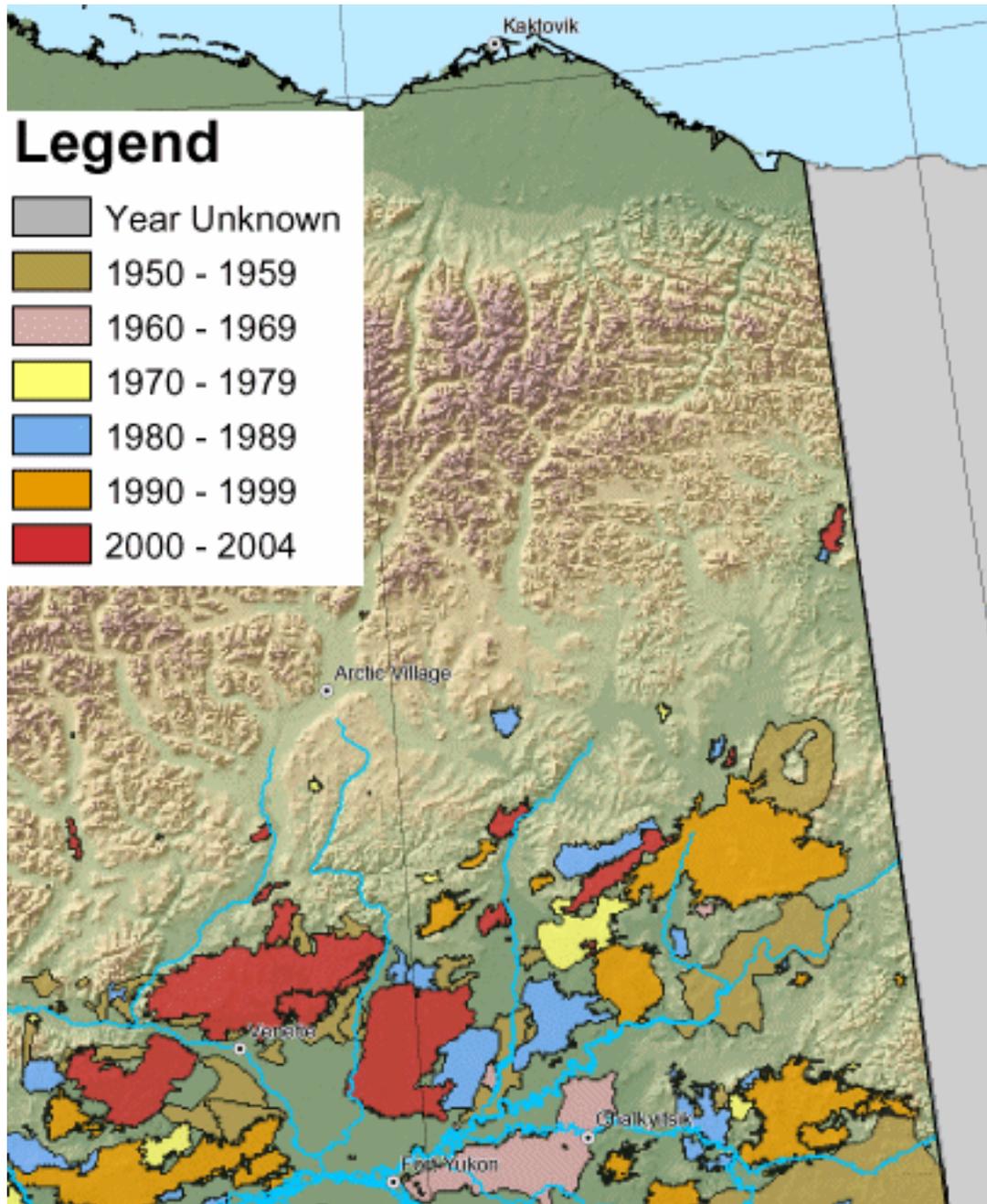


Forest Fires in Northern Alaska



What is happening?

- This map shows the location of forest fires in northeast Alaska during the past 54 years. The colour code for each decade reveals the location and size of burned forest patches

of different ages. The red blocks, showing just the first four years of the current decade, appear to cover an area equal to any other decade.

- Forest fires were widespread in interior Alaska in both 2004 and 2005.

Why is it happening?

- Wild fire is a natural force in boreal forests. In wilderness areas few fires are caused by humans and most fires are started by lightning. In years when moisture levels are low fires may continue burning for long periods and cover large areas of forest.
- Tundra areas seldom burn because there is little accumulation of dry vegetation above ground and fires do not spread easily. Fires in tundra areas do not seem to get hot enough to seriously damage the vegetation and areas often recover within a few years.

Why is it important?

- Lichens are important winter foods for caribou and fire may have an effect on the amount of preferred lichens growing in an area. Recently burned areas as well as very old forests tend to have less lichen. Caribou can benefit from the effects of wild fires when the land is turned into a patchwork of plant communities with different ages. Caribou can then take advantage of good winter foraging spots where there are lots of lichens or easy snow to dig feeding craters.
- Some plants and animals rely on older forest stands so an increase in the rate of forest fires could make these older habitats rare.

Technical Notes

- These data were obtained from the Alaska Geospatial Data Clearinghouse.

Links

- [Forest Fires in Northern Yukon](#)
- [Forest Fires in the NWT](#)

Data added: March 12, 2006