

Fire Environment Statement

Northern Lower Peninsula and Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan

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Subject: The northern lower peninsula and eastern upper peninsula of Michigan experienced an extreme ice storm event in March of 2025. This resulted in heavy concentrations of surface fuels due to severely damaged overstory vegetation. Fuels have cured for over a year, and fire risk is further exacerbated if drought conditions occur.

Discussion: Fire activity in northern Michigan is typically greatest during spring and early summer. During this time, live herbaceous fuels are fully or partially cured, and coniferous trees go through “spring dip” where needle moisture content drops. In the spring, wildfire conditions can be volatile, with the potential for fires to escape initial attack and exhibit extreme fire behavior. The influx of fine dead fuels produced by the ice storm will increase extreme fire behavior potential in the spring. Additionally, portions of the ice storm impact area have been under abnormally dry conditions or drought for the past two years, and development of dry conditions in the fall is a common occurrence. Alignment of drought, favorable fire weather, and increased fuel loading due to the ice storm will likely create periods of above normal fire risk. Drought conditions, especially in the fall, will result in situations where heavy fuels generated by the ice storm are available to burn, increasing potential for extreme fire behavior and presenting additional safety concerns.

Difference from Normal Conditions:

- Approximately 3.5 million acres of timber fuel exist in the ice storm impact area and there is a 2 - 3 times increase in surface fuel loading within the most severely damaged areas.
- When compared to pre-storm conditions, modeled fire behavior estimates show an expected 2 - 4 times increase in fire behavior in pine areas, and an expected 2 times increase in hardwood areas.
- Portions of the ice storm impact area have been under abnormally dry conditions or drought.
- An increased risk for torching and crowing in residual trees exists due to increases in ladder fuels and potential fire intensity. Spotting potential is also increased.

Firefighter and Public Concerns:

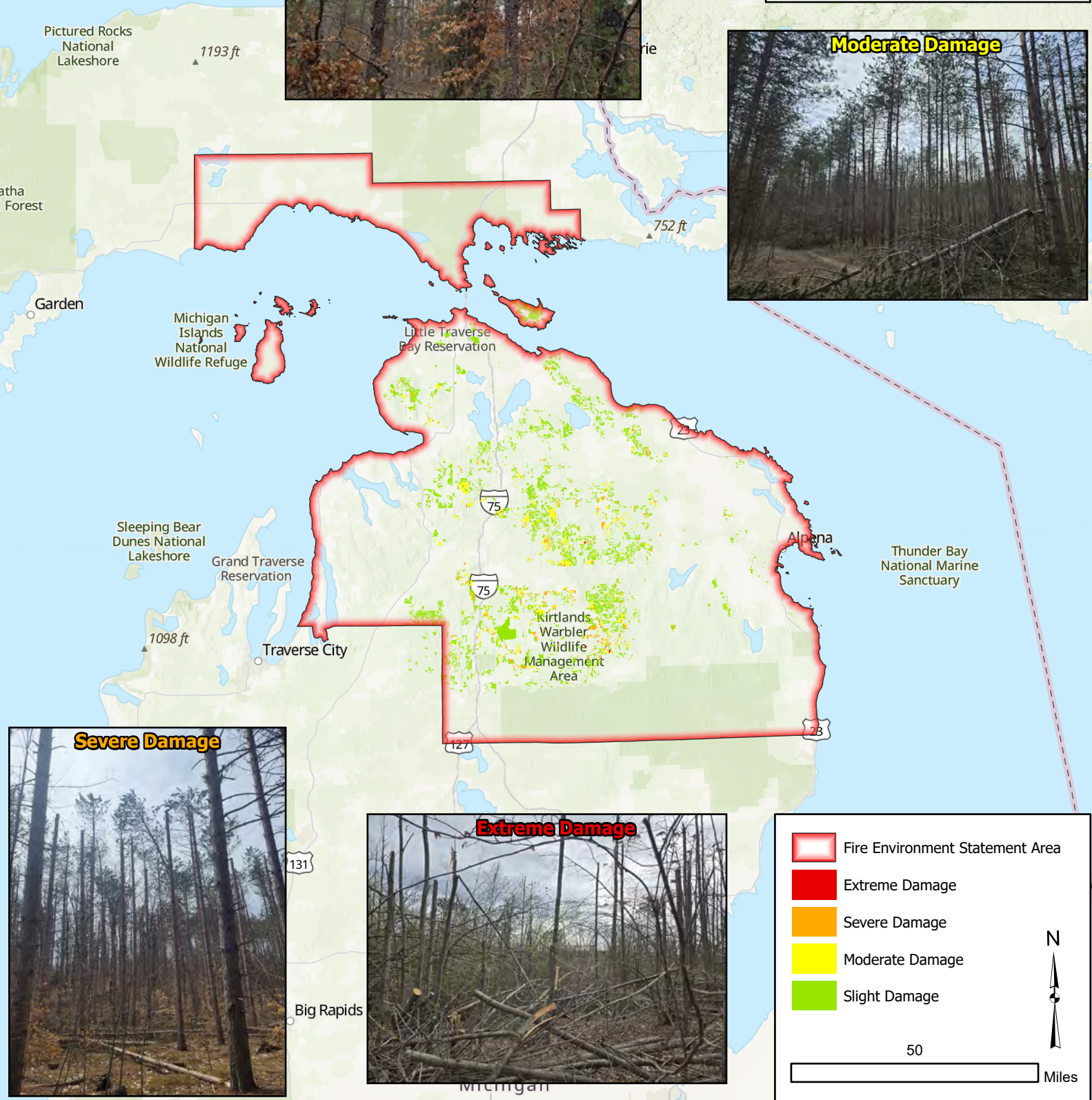
- Heavy concentrations of dead surface fuel will amplify fire intensity, promote crown fire initiation, increase extreme fire behavior potential, and will require additional time for mop-up. Traditional triggers for wind speed may be too high, especially with lower RH or drought present.
- Overhead hazards and weakened trees increase risk to firefighters and the public.
- Heavy fuel loading creates access issues, reduces fireline production rates, delays response time, and can compromise escape routes.
- Increased potential for heavy smoke concentrations and related health impacts.
- Potential for new fire starts as landowners continue to burn storm-generated debris.
- Increased potential for longer duration fires, which are costlier, drain local resources, and increase the need for out-of-area resources.

Mitigation Measures:

- Increase messaging as short-term weather conditions align with long-term fuel and drought concerns. Limit debris burning permits as conditions warrant.
- Increase fuel mitigation efforts with an increased focus on WUI areas.
- Increase staffing and availability of heavy equipment. Additional need for aircraft support. Possible tactical change needed to include more indirect and extended attack approaches.
- Take time to conduct proper size-ups, assess safety zone size, evaluate escape routes, and have trigger points for when to disengage.

Issued By: Eastern Area Coordination Center, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

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- Fire Environment Statement Area
- Extreme Damage
- Severe Damage
- Moderate Damage
- Slight Damage

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Miles

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