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NEWS RELEASE



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**STATEMENT BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ON
MILLER'S REACH VERDICT**

(Juneau) - Alaska Attorney General Gregg Renkes today released the following statement regarding the jury's decision on the Miller's Reach fire class action lawsuit:

"The jury in the Millers Reach Fire Case returned a unanimous verdict in favor of the Division of Forestry and the State of Alaska. It concluded that the State was not negligent in fighting the fire.

"The State is pleased with the jury's verdict and thank them for their service and commitment in hearing this lengthy trial.

"The State's vigorous defense demonstrates its determination to protect our ability to respond to natural disasters.

"Fighting a fire is a big logistical challenge - like fighting a war -- it is essential that firefighters be free to take appropriate action in light of their experience and expertise, based upon their evaluation of the situation at the time.

"The verdict lifts the shadow of this lawsuit, which has hung over the Division of Forestry since 1998. This is important going into this year's fire season.

"The verdict also recognizes that acts of nature like the wind gusts at Miller's Reach can overcome and overwhelm even the most experienced and best-trained firefighters in the world.

"Perhaps most important -- the jury's decision in this case is an opportunity for the people affected by the fire to get beyond finger pointing, pull together as a community and help those who suffered losses as a result of this disaster.

"The Division of Forestry will continue to work with Local Volunteer Fire Departments and local communities to educate the public on how to reduce the impact of wildland urban interface fires by the creation of defensible space around their homes.

"Let's hope for a safe fire season."

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