

PICTURE OF THE MONTH

Alaskan Forest Fires

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During the month of June, Alaska experienced the most damaging forest fires since 1957. A very dry winter, with little snow cover, and a very warm and dry spring brought about a dangerously high possibility of forest fires. By mid-June, many areas were burning. Most of these fires are believed to be a result of man's clearing the land. By the end of June nearly 400 fires had blackened more than three million acres.

For many days, smoke areas from these fires could be seen in satellite photographs. The best view occurred on June 27, 1969 (fig. 1). Weak surface winds and a large high-pressure area at 500 mb restricted the mixing and widespread dispersion of the smoke. At the time of this view, 30 fires were known to have existed.

Over 300,000 acres of forest land were burning at Hot Springs (K). Smoke from this fire drifted westward, and much of it settled in the Yukon and Koyukuk River

Valleys (L). Smoke from another major fire at Fort Yukon is less apparent at (M). Although the total acreage under fire is about the same as that at Hot Springs, the type of vegetation may be different and may result in the darker appearing smoke. Large areas of smoke produced by numerous smaller fires can be seen in the areas east and southwest of (N).

Snow cover remains on the highest mountains and can be seen above the smoke. Among the various mountains with detectable snow are the Alaska Range, including Mt. Whitney (N), and the Chugach Mountains which stretch southeastward along the coast of Alaska.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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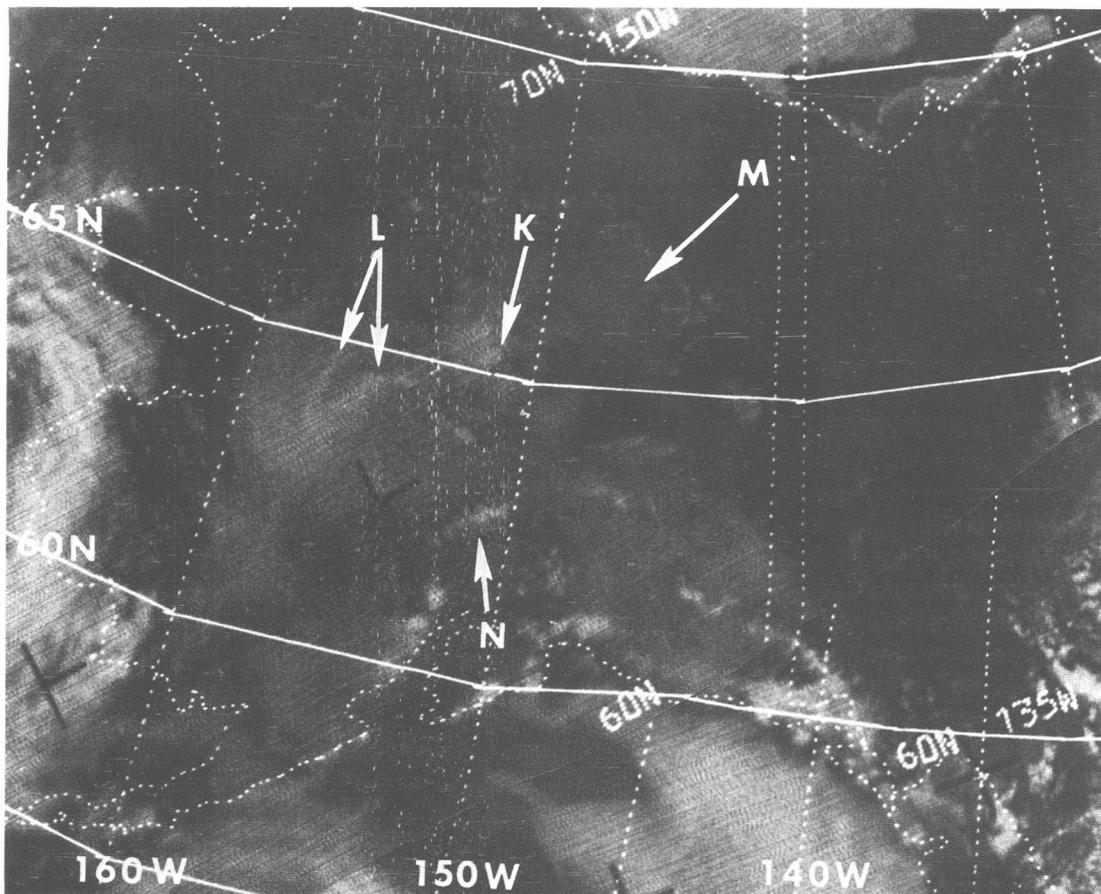


FIGURE 1.—ESSA-9 mosaic, Pass 1518, 2204 GMT, June 27, 1969.