



Southern Area Decision Support Group Charter

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Approved by:

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Southern Area SACG, Chair (01/2025 - 01/2027)

Authority

The Southern Area Decision Support Group (DSG) is established pursuant to the charter authority granted to the parent group, the Southern Area Coordinating Group (SACG) through the respective regional Fire Management Officers/Directors for the Department of Agriculture - US Forest Service, Department of Interior Bureaus, and the Southern Group of State Foresters, to accomplish SACG mission, vision, beliefs, and goals. The DSG has the authority to develop and execute an annual program of work as approved by SACG. The DSG, through its Decision Support Group Lead (DSGL), has broad authority to make contacts, assign work within the DSG, make commitments on behalf of the DSG, and commit such resources that are available within the DSG. The DSGL may request further resources and authority as needed.

Mission

The Southern Area Decision Support Group (DSG) is committed to advancing the science and application of fire weather, fuels, and fire danger rating for planning and operational support to SACG, Incident Management Teams (IMTs), Incident Commanders (ICs), and field units within the Southern Area.

The objectives of the DSG are as follows:

1. To provide leadership in wildland fire environmental criteria while following wildland fire policies and recommending/maintaining consistent regional policies, standards, and procedures
2. To facilitate coordination efforts between fire weather, fire behavior, fire danger rating, predictive services, and smoke/air quality groups
3. Provide leadership and promote communication within the interagency community using standard National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) National Fire Danger Rating System in addressing issues such as system application, quality and standards of inputs and outputs, information flow and access, operational continuity, training, problem identification, technological advancements, and provide a forum for input into research priorities
4. To ensure the capability and capacity to measure, predict and monitor wildland fire environmental conditions and provide customer products, if possible, beyond the scope of normal operations
5. Utilize standard NWCG Fire Danger Rating System information, practices, and analysis to support management decisions with emphasis on protection of life and property.
6. Provide system access, training, guidance, and direct support for Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) decisions and fire spread/behavior modeling (FSPro, FlamMap MTT, FARSITE, etc.) to inform decisions.
7. Provide oversight and input to Interagency Fire Danger Operating Plans (FDOP) and Pocket Card development

Purpose

The mission and intent of the Southern Area Decision Support Group (DSG) is to provide a broad range of decision support products, including information to help with risk-based strategies and decisions, to a broad spectrum of users. Examples include but are not limited to wildfire behavior analysis, WFDSS decision support, wildfire assessments, fire weather and fuels assessment, support for the Southern Area Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (SA MAC) incident prioritization, resource allocation, and offer a common point of contact for all fire managers and incidents within the Southern Area.

The DSG can be utilized to prepare for and during periods of high wildfire activity in support of the Southern Area Coordinating Group (SACG) and/or individual units throughout the Southern Area. The co-location of WFDSS technical experts, Strategic Operational Planners (SOPLs), Long Term Analysts (LTANs), Fire Behavior Analysts (FBANs), air quality specialists and Air Resource Advisors (ARAs), and GIS specialists (GISS) make it possible to offer this support throughout the Southern Area.

The Decision Support Group will:

- Work for the Decision Support Group Lead (DSGL) and SACG.
- DSG can be activated by the DSGL, as needed, to perform duties within the DSG or those historically performed by the 'Fire Environment Working Team'. (*Refer Appendix A for working group history*)
- Provide fire behavior predictions, incident wildfire behavior analyses, and maps of fire activity for the SA MAC.
- Ensure consistency with the guidelines of each Agency by working with Regional Agency contacts on policies and procedures.
- Initiate analysis at the request of local units for emerging incidents.
- Provide analysis, as requested, for Federal Management Assistance Grants (FMAG).
- Provide general WFDSS documentation expertise, as requested.
- Facilitate ordering of critical subject matter experts/specialists for specific incidents, as requested by the local unit and/or SACG or SA MAC representative.
- Support the SACG or SA MAC, as requested.

The Decision Support Group is managed by an assigned DSGL, who has a broad knowledge of decision support tools. Staffing will scale up and down based on the preparedness level, the number and complexity of active incidents in the Southern Area. When fully engaged, the group will likely include the DSGL, a FBAN, multiple SOPLs, multiple LTANs, a WFDSS decision documentation technical specialist, an ARA, and a GISS (*see Appendix B*). The DSGL will coordinate with the SA MAC (or Agency representatives during periods of less fire activity) and assign work amongst the group. The intent of the SOPL position is to provide direct support, either on-site or remote, to those agencies experiencing incident activity. The SOPLs and/or WFDSS Decision Drivers may be strategically located throughout the Southern Area.

The DSG is expected to interface with Southern Area Coordination Center (SACC) personnel on a regular basis, as this is a joint effort of service/support to the field units, particularly Intelligence and Weather. SACC Predictive Services personnel are tasked with the 'big picture' view of the entire Southern Area. The SACC Meteorologists perform the briefings and products for SA MAC group, fire environment briefings, and weather environment briefings in conjunction with the DSG. In some cases, Incident Meteorologists (IMET) may be ordered to concentrate on local site-specific incident weather, to serve at the local or incident level. The IMET may work with the SACC Meteorologists but will not supersede the SACC Meteorologists in SACC products or briefings. The DSGL will work with SACC Predictive Services personnel to create products and outputs that are consistent, recognizing that when SACC reaches capacity, there could be a need for additional staffing in the DSG to avoid interference with SACC operations. It is imperative that the DSGL works closely with SACC Predictive Services, SACC Center Manager and/or the SA MAC Coordinator to ensure products and support are managed efficiently.

Membership

The Chairperson of this working group will have the responsibility to function as the primary Lead for the Decision Support Group. Under the current posture, the Chairperson by De facto will fall to the USFS, Fire Analyst position, until another partnering agency has a person that has the skill set to function as the Decision Support Group Lead. At such times the charter will be revisited to establish an updated tenure and rotation.

This working group is open to any/all agencies that are members of the Southern Area Coordinating Group. It is encouraged that all agencies with interested personnel and skill set be part of this working group.

Activation Procedures

Activation will occur at the request of the Southern Area Coordinating Group (SACG) or if any Agency within the Southern Area reaches capacity to produce decision support-related products. SACG will be notified of any activation where multiple specialists are requested to perform the request. In most individual requests for support, SACG will not need to be officially notified. The Geographic Area Editor for each federal agency is key in determining when capacity has been reached. Generally, it is highly recommended to activate the DSG when the Southern Area Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (SA MAC) is activated.

Logistics Need

With the advancement of technology, this allows for various options for ‘location’ of the Southern Area Decision Support Group (DSG). The DSG may utilize the room established on the 4th floor at Southern Area Coordination Center SACC for decision support if not convening virtually or off-site. Regardless of location the following are needed.

- Computer workspace for up to 8 personnel (desk, power, internet access for multi-agency employees).
- 3 phones, at least one with speakerphone capabilities.
- Color Printer.
- Plotter (if available).
- Copy machines (availability at SACC or other office may work).
- Office supplies (pens, highlighters, staplers, 3-hole punch, copy paper, sticky notes, writing tablets).
- Phone list(s), i.e. Southern Area Fire Card.
- A TV monitor or screen that can be used for virtual meetings and to display websites and maps for DSG situational awareness.

Work Requests and Prioritization Process

Fire Behavior Analysis Requests

Generally, an agency representative is aware of the need/requests for fire analysis on agency incidents within the Southern Area. This is due to close coordination with the local units and/or contact with the respective agency regional duty officer. The agency representative will send a request to the Southern Area Decision Support Group (DSG) based on the need. If the agency representative is not already assigned to the DSG, then they will place this request to the Decision Support Group Lead (DSGL). When a request for an analysis is submitted in Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS), there is no automated way to alert the Fire Behavior Specialists that a request exists. If a local Fire Behavior Specialist is not available, the local incident needs to contact the DSGL or Fire Behavior Specialist to ask for assistance. The DSG will monitor fire behavior requests in WFDSS and keep track of analysis needs. If an incident is expected to be long-duration and/or needs extensive analysis for strategy development for suppression activities of the fire, it is generally recommended to have a local analyst. The DSGL will assist in finding a qualified analyst to work locally, if needed. Generally, if a fire is managed by a Complex Incident Management Team (CIMT), on-site analyst capabilities are recommended (i.e., the analysis should be done by someone at the incident, not at the DSG), but off-site analysis at the DSG may be required during periods of high fire activity when analysts are supporting analyses for multiple fires.

Prioritization of Requests

The DSGL will coordinate requests with the Jurisdictional Agencies. The prioritized request list will be approved by the Southern Area Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (SA MAC). Request prioritization may include, but not limited to, the following considerations:

- Emerging incidents

- Fires in proximity to identified critical values
- Fires without obvious natural barriers
- Fires with long-term potential
- Politically or publicly sensitive fires
- Fires with potential for high costs
- Fires within altered or damaged fuels (i.e. fuels impacted by hurricane or wind event)

Ordering and Coding of Time

All resource orders for staffing the DSG will be coordinated through the DSGL. All DSG resources will be ordered on the Southern Area Coordination Center (SACC) or USFS Regional Large Fire support code, through the appropriate approval process. OF-288 Incident Time Reports will be used for tracking and documenting time reporting and will typically be signed by the DSGL unless delegated to other members of the DSG. To deal with short surges of workload, virtual analysts may be utilized. These virtual analysts will report to the DSGL, and their assignments will be managed in conjunction with the other on-site analysts.

Appendix A: Working Group History

In 2001, several federal and state groups in the Southern Area expressed interest in a regional group to provide more focus on the use and consistency of fire danger rating in the Southern Area. At the 2002 Southern Area Center Manager's meeting, a group met to discuss the possibility of a formal working team within the geographic area. It was decided to move forward with the process of creating a formal geographic area working team. Later that same year a request was made by the Southern Area Coordinating Group (SACG) to make fire weather part of the team. Near the end of 2002, SACG formally established the Southern Area Fire Weather and Fire Danger Working Team. At the December 2004 meeting of the SACG, it was decided to follow the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) model of incorporating the functions of predictive services, fire behavior, and smoke management. The commonality of these functions is focused on measuring and predicting the wildland fire environment. The fire environment elements to be included in the new Working Team are predictive services, fire behavior, National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS), fire weather and smoke management. In 2016, the Fire Environment Working Team transitioned and became known as the Decision Support Center Group (now known as Decision Support Group - DSG).

Appendix B: Decision Support Group Roles, Responsibilities, and Qualification Requirements

(Depending on workload, one person may fill more than one role)

Decision Support Group Lead (DSGL)

- Reports to the Southern Area Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (SA MAC) (when activated) or, during periods of less fire activity, an Agency representative from the Southern Area. In situations when the DSGL is not being filled by an agency employee of the Southern Area, the DSGL should be provided oversight by one of the Geographic Area Editor (GAE)s within the Southern Area.
- Coordinates policies and procedures with the Regional Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) GAEs and any analysts for each Agency.
- Supervises the rest of the Southern Area Decision Support Group (DSG).
- Coordinates staffing and ordering of resources for the entire DSG.
- Responsible for coordinating requests from incidents, assigning tasks, and overseeing timely delivery of products.
- Coordinates data needs and products with SACC Predictive Services personnel.
- Maintains the Southern Area Decision Support FireNet TEAMS channel, organizes the SharePoint filing structure, and ensures documents and incident products are filed and saved appropriately: [Southern | National Fire Decision Support Center | Microsoft Teams](#)
- Oversees development of a DSG Incident Action Plan (IAP) if requested by SACG, SA MAC, and/or agency leads as a DSG communication tool and for documentation of DSG activities and products.
- Recommended skills: broad knowledge of decision support tools, serving as GAE (if possible), strategic fire operations, and ability to lead a team effectively.

Fire Behavior Analyst (FBAN)

- Produces or updates fire behavior advisories.
- Provides short-term fire potential overview for the SA MAC.
- Gathers input and intelligence on fire behavior from FBANs/ LTANs in the field or with IMTs. Coordinates and disseminates information amongst field and/or IMT FBANs/LTANs to ensure information is being shared regarding fire behavior conditions.
- Prepares a daily fire behavior/fire potential forecast for the Southern Area, as requested.
- Reviews and provides feedback to fire behavior specialists on products, as needed.
- Reviews and updates National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Pocket Cards.
- May be deployed on-site at active incidents, or travel to multiple incidents, to collect fire behavior intel, provide fire behavior briefings, and/or assess needs of IMTs and ICs.
- Recommended skills: red card qualified FBAN or LTAN.

Long Term Analyst (LTAN)

- This position may be activated at any time the workload demands.
- Responsible for completing specific technical analyses utilizing a range of fire behavior models, including BEHAVE, FARSITE, FlamMap, FSPro and others.
- Communicates with incident personnel on fire activity, fuels, and analysis needs.
- Responsible for completing appropriate documentation for every fire behavior analysis and filing each analysis.
- Trainees are encouraged, but any products they produce need to be reviewed by an experienced fire behavior specialist or a fully qualified LTAN/FBAN.

- Recommended skills: red card qualified FBAN, LTAN, or other THSP for WFDSS. Fire Behavior Specialist qualification in WFDSS is required. Must demonstrate competency with fire behavior models (e.g., FlamMap, FARSITE and FSPro).

GIS Specialist (GISS)

- Coordinates with the FBAN and other fire behavior specialists to produce maps, spatial data, and other products for the SA MAC, incidents, and Agencies (as requested).
- Provides data to update websites, web pages, and ftp sites.
- Completes tasks according to work priorities, files products and notes updates.
- Maintains access with read/write access to NIFC AGOL
- Recommended skills: red card qualified GISS.

Strategic Operational Planners (SOPL)

- It has been highly successful to have roving SOPLs connected to the DSG in the field to support emerging type III fires. Longer term incidents such as complex incidents should likely have SOPL's assigned to the incident, but this is not always feasible. Remote support is an option if a SOPL or SOPLs are covering multiple fires at a time.
- Provides federal agencies with support in documenting fire decisions in WFDSS.
- Keeps track of decisions and notifies DSG of fires that may need a decision or an updated decision.
- Summarizes fires to describe long-term implications.
- Coordinates with FBANs/LTANs to ensure products are available for Decision documentation.
- Recommended skills: experienced with WFDSS decisions and assisting others through the process. Experience with Incident Strategic Alignment Process (ISAP) is a plus but is not required. Ability to work with multiple federal agency requirements for decision-making.

Air Resource Advisors (ARA)

- Air Resource Advisors are another decision support resource that is in short supply.
- Typically, type III fires can be supported by one of the regular Region 8 USFS air quality specialists, virtually.
- For long duration events and/or Complex Incident Management Team (CIMT) fires, an ARA would likely be ordered from the incident. It is possible for an ARA to support multiple incidents in-person or remotely depending on the situation.
- Because of the short supply of ARA skill set, it may be advantageous in certain situations to have an ARA in the DSG to support emerging fires, multiple type III fires or long duration fires. It is a desirable situation to put the ARA and FBAN supporting the incident in the same location.
- Regardless of whether an ARA is staffed at the DSG, any ARAs and related support should be coordinated by the DSG.

Situation Unit Leader (SITL)

- Although not required during low to moderate fire activity, ordering a SITL to support the DSG may be desirable as fire activity increases, and the DSG is required to track a higher volume of requests across multiple incidents.
- SITLs can be tasked to develop an IAP for the DSG as requested; track DSG requests, resulting products, and accomplishments; develop and maintain DSG meeting schedules; lead planning meetings; maintain and update the Southern Area Decision Support FireNet TEAMS; be delegated other DSG tasks as needed.
- Recommended skills: red-carded and qualified SITL; familiar with working with decision support groups or centers.