

Northern Rockies Fire Management Strategic Plan for the 2016 Fire Season

Introduction

This Strategic Plan is tiered to the Federal Fire and Aviation Operations 2016 Action Plan and the NRCG MAC Operating Handbook for the Northern Rockies. Geographic Area emphasis will continue to be on Initial and Extended Attack incidents, Fire Leadership, and Appropriate Response. Close management oversight, leadership and decision making is required on all emerging fires. Communication and coordination between interagency partners throughout the year is key in managing incidents within the Northern Rockies (NR).

Situation Assessment

Data shows the drought severity lessening across Northern Idaho and Northwestern Montana. Adequate fall precipitation along with near normal snowpack has placed Western Montana and Northern Idaho in a more favorable position entering spring 2016 than what was observed in 2015. Even though snowpack melting rates have been faster than average, spring precipitation has been timely and near average. Temperatures have been above normal. East of the Continental Divide, normal to above normal precipitation has fallen in most areas. There are two exceptions: South Central and Southeastern Montana. Both locations have missed out on many of the precipitation events that have impacted the Northern Plains. As a result, live fuel moisture values did not reach 100% in these areas, and curing of the fine fuels is occurring at a faster rate than normal.

With a warm and dry June expected, Predictive Services anticipates a normal start to the fire season region-wide. The fire season should initiate in late June across Southeastern Montana and migrate westward by early-mid July. The potential for above normal large fire activity exists across Southeastern Montana during this period. Other locations are expected to receive near average activity this season. By season's end, which should be mid-late September, the region as a whole is expected to have experienced a "Normal" fire season.

Resources and Preparedness

The Geographic Area expects to be at 95% of the fire fighter production capabilities of Initial Attack resources during the peak fire season. The Northern Rockies agencies will coordinate severity requests to add additional resources to meet severe conditions.

Safe and aggressive Initial Attack is the key for keeping burned acreage and resource losses to a minimum. Initial attack is a priority over large incidents within the Northern Rockies. Primary resources for successful Initial Attack include the following:

- Fully staffed engines and Initial Attack modules
- Type II and III Helicopters
- Smokejumpers – consider boosters
- Large Air Tankers and Single-Engine Air Tankers (SEATS)
- Leadership (Type III, IV and V Incident Commanders)
- Type III Organizational capability planned in Zone Annual Operating Plans
- Type II IA and Type II Crews and Wildland Fire Modules
- Appropriate staffing at Dispatch Centers
- Appropriate staffing at National and Regional caches
- Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) platform available

The Northern Rockies Coordination Center will track resources and ensure that resources are, shared, and managed to provide adequate response to incidents. Northern Rockies Operations, with concurrence from Northern Rockies MAC will prioritize incidents and facilitate movement of resources between incidents.

Smokejumpers will be utilized for initial attack response, emerging fires, implementing management actions on wildland fires, implementing specific actions on long duration wildfires, and to provide fire management leadership. This includes performing as a crew and as single resource overhead.

Type 1 crews will be utilized in varied aspects of fire management. They may be utilized as IA or wildland fire modules, and provide needed supervisory overhead positions as needed.

As part of the National Mobilization needs the Northern Rockies has capitalized on opportunities to assist other Geographic Areas in their fire management and aviation needs. Most of the federal agencies are currently sharing resources with the southwest region through an informal agreement, as the two geographic areas experience seasonally different fire seasons. This makes for efficient use of resources and provides good training and experiences for our fire personnel.

Priorities

All unplanned wildland fire ignitions require a response. This is guided by the strategies and objectives outlined in a units Land and Resource management plan that reflects land and resource values, management goals and objectives or agency regulation. Response is based on an evaluation of risks to firefighter and public safety, land and resource and fire management objectives, resource availability, the circumstances under which fire occurs, including weather and fuel conditions, protection priorities, values to be protected and cost effectiveness. A priority matrix will be utilized to document how incidents are prioritized in the Geographic Area. Sage Grouse habitat will be considered a high natural resource priority after Life and Property.

Wildland Fire Priorities

When multiple IA and large fires are occurring and there is competition for critical resources, prioritization becomes essential. Consider using the following priorities when allocating limited equipment and personnel:

1. Firefighter and public safety
2. Initial Attack
3. Emerging Incidents (Type 3)
4. Community Protection
5. Critical Infrastructure (e.g., Utilities)
6. Threats to Other Structures and Improvements
7. Natural Resource Protection
8. BAER Project Support

Sage Grouse habitat will be considered a high natural resource priority after Life and Property.

The Geographic Area (GA) will utilize information from NIMS ICS-209's and decision support criteria definitions to prioritize incidents within the GA. Zone MACs will be encouraged to take an active role in managing resources and prioritizing incidents within their zone. Zone MACs will coordinate with the Geographic MAC and/or Northern Rockies Operations.

Contingency Planning

1. When resource shortages are occurring and there is elevated potential for emerging incidents, (i.e. anticipated dry lightning) a ready reserve will be identified from resources available in the Geographic Area. This would include resources assigned to incidents. This ready reserve may consist of crews, aircraft, engines, and overhead positions including Type 3 IC's. These resources are not expected to

be staged but utilized and identified on the Incident Action Plan in a manner that meets mobilization guidelines.

2. Northern Rockies Operations, in coordination and with concurrence from NR MAC, will prioritize moving resources between incidents based upon priority, including single resources and incident management teams.
3. Northern Rockies Wildland Fire Management strategies will be utilized.
4. Resources will be shared between incidents across the Geographic area.

Geographic Draw Down

Resources will be coordinated and shared across the Geographic Area at all planning levels for incidents and projects. All zones will establish draw down plans for their zone to include local unit needs. The Geographic draw down level for resources is an accumulation of the zone level plans. Resource levels will be coordinated with all the zones across the GA. This coordination will increase as the planning levels increase based on current and expected needs.

All Team resources managed by NRCG at Northern Rockies (NR) planning levels 1-3 will be available for out of area assignments. At NR planning levels 4, the GA will require 4 Type 2 Teams and 1 Wildland Fire Management Team to remain within the GA. At PL-5 all Type 2 Teams and Wildland Fire Management Teams will be utilized within the GA.

Areas with sage grouse habitat will maintain adequate initial attack resources to provide for protection of that habitat. Sage grouse habitat will be considered as a high natural resource priority after life and property.

Prescribed Fire/Wildland Fire Priorities

1. High priority for resource commitment will be given to prescribed fire use and wildland fires throughout the fire season.
2. At Preparedness Levels 4 and 5, follow the established protocol in the National and Northern Rockies Mobilization Guides.

All Risk Priority

Agencies will be requested to respond to non-fire emergencies. On a case-by-case basis, this will have to be evaluated in accordance with State and Federal law using the following prioritization:

1. National security
3. Protection of life
4. Protection of property
5. Protection of natural resources

Safety

1. Firefighter and public safety is our first priority and will not be compromised.
2. Management will ensure that proper fire management leadership is available and that these individuals are receiving appropriate rest. As production resources are added to the Units, consideration of additional leadership will occur.
3. Provide critical safety management oversight and leadership. (e.g., ground safety specialist, aviation safety specialist and/or Fire Safety Assistance Teams).
4. NRCG will encourage a strong sense of situational awareness for the safety of firefighters on the fire ground.
5. Increase and maintain a high level of Fire Management and Agency Administrator oversight on Initial Attack and Extended Attack incidents.
6. During the fire season, a large number of fire transitions from Initial Attack to Extended Attack are possible. Ensure that all Fire Managers and Agency Administrators are providing the necessary oversight during transition.
7. Managers need to manage the Work – Rest guidelines throughout the season to include long term fire situations. Staggering days off and ordering replacements early is encouraged.
8. Firefighters need to be able to operate radios between narrow and wide bands.

9. Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones (LCES) remain a pivotal element for firefighter safety, and we continue to promote and develop these fundamentals;
- Individual firefighters and line overhead must be able to relate LCES mitigations at all times while engaged in suppression and prescribed fire activities.
 - Pilots and flight crews will assist in the establishment and evaluation of LCES mitigations on the ground.
 - Line Officers must implement LCES mitigations, and expect all firefighters to maintain quality LCES. Arranging field tours with experts to enhance their understanding of Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones is encouraged.
 - Narrow/wide band training and radio use for fire personnel by all agencies would prove beneficial.

Leadership

1. Activate the Geographic Area Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC):
 - (A) When fire management activities begin to compete for scarce resources
 - (B) Where the Geographic Area moves into Preparedness Level 5
 - (C) When it is recommended by NRCG Agency Administrators
 - (D) Upon consultation with NRCG member where the majority is in agreement.Pursue representation from State emergency service agencies, local law enforcement and State Fire Chief's association to coordinate community protection issues.
2. When the NR MAC is activated, conduct an Agency Administrator (Regional Forester, State Forester, BLM State Director, etc.) briefing to gain consensus and confirmation from the administrators on the authorities of the MAC group and established priorities for complex fires.
3. Request additional overhead and support to ensure coverage and required rest for Fire Managers, Aviation personnel and Agency Administrators.
4. Utilize Zone MAC Groups to coordinate activities and collaborate on fire management issues at a more local level. These MAC Groups can provide prioritization within their sub-geographic areas thereby assisting the Geographic MAC. Zone MAC's should be activated early.
5. Maintain open lines of communication and assign a liaison between NR MAC, National Guard leaders, Fish and Wildlife Officials & Utility Companies. Involve liaison with MAC groups as appropriate.
6. Require performance evaluations on all private fire service contractor resources. Copies of the evaluations should be forwarded to NRCC.

Initial Attack/Operations

1. Initial and Extended Attack will be the priority in the Northern Rockies. Develop and follow zone draw down plans that maintain Initial Attack capabilities and leadership at Preparedness Levels 3 thru 5. Replace Initial Attack resources committed to large incidents as quickly as possible.
2. Consider using Type 1 resources (i.e. Hotshot Crews, Smokejumpers) on Initial Attack and emerging Extended Attack fires. (Coordinate closely with Northern Rockies Operations).
3. Implement trigger points for ordering additional resources and management infrastructure into the Geographic Area before the resources within the Northern Rockies Area are over-committed. Pre-positioning of resources is a key to success.
4. At Preparedness Level 5 establish a Type 3 "ready-reserve" of resources from each zone that is capable of rapid deployment to an area with Initial Attack and Extended Attack needs. Teams assigned in zones will assist in identifying and managing IA resources.
5. Maximize the use of smokejumper resources assigned to the Area. Smokejumpers may be utilized as overhead in all aspects of fire management.
6. At Preparedness Level 4, units should be prepared to hire and train AD and EFF crews, local volunteer fire department personnel and private fire service contractors to meet local and, as appropriate, National needs.

Aviation

1. Mobilize additional Single Engine Air Tanker Bases within the Geographic Area and move them according to need. Plan to staff each base with 2 SEAT aircraft and appropriate overhead and leadership.
2. Mobilize additional aviation resources for Initial Attack with severity funds as conditions warrant. In addition, aerial supervision and management should be increased as additional aviation assets are ordered.
3. Prioritize flight time for initial attack.

4. Utilize Exclusive Use helicopters within the Geographic Area. Ensure proper oversight is provided with resources and utilization of resources between zones.
5. Preposition Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) platforms as needed.
6. Encourage early detection flights and increase the number of flights at PL Levels 4 and 5.
7. Evaluate the use of MAFFS aircraft to supplement aviation resources in Great Falls, Helena, Billings and Spokane.
8. Evaluate CL-215/415's for use at Coeur d'Alene, Helena, Lewistown and Kalispell as the season progresses.

Logistics and Mobilization

1. Develop staging and mobilization centers, as needed, in support of fire activities.
2. Out-of-Area Type 1 and Type 2 Incident Management Teams may be staged in strategic locations as conditions necessitate. Staged teams will be placed at the top of the rotation and the need for continued staging will be evaluated daily.
3. Provide a comprehensive briefing for resources coming into the Northern Rockies from outside the Area.
4. Rotate out-of-Area resources and management infrastructure into the Northern Rockies to keep Area resources rested and fresh.
5. Ensure national and regional caches are staffed and stocked at appropriate levels. Contingency plans should be in place to ensure regional coverage in the event of multiple unrelated emergency response situations.

Planning and Coordination

1. Assigning a Long Term Fire Behavior Analyst should be considered when the Incident Support Organization is working with MAC. Review WFDSS and request incidents to update WFDSS inputs where there are insufficient resources to accomplish the selected alternative. LTAN's or other assistance will be made available to local units to assist with fire behavior predictions.
2. Ensure management response is commensurate with requirements outlined in agency fire and land management plans.
3. Establish regular agency administrator/fire management conference calls. Recommend weekly calls at Preparedness Levels 3 and 4, and daily at Preparedness Level 5, or when fire activity dictates.
4. At Preparedness Levels 4 and 5, establish daily NRCG MAC conference calls that may include Zone-MAC, Area Command and Incident Commanders.
5. Utilize long term assessments and management response in allocating resources across the GAC. Establish and utilize a fire behavior assessment group in predictive services.

Fire Prevention and Information

1. During the spring, utilize fire prevention personnel, media contacts, and interagency partners to emphasize fire prevention awareness and wildland fire management response.
2. When multiple human-caused fires occur, evaluate the need to mobilize Geographic and National Fire Prevention Teams to work with the public, agencies and local communities. Ensure strong communication between these teams, Agency Administrators, State and County authorities, and Incident Management Teams.
3. As activity increases, consider assigning a media contact to the Incident Support Organization working with GMAC.
4. Address and coordinate fire restrictions and closure processes preseason. Establish a Geographic Restrictions Coordinator to work with the area interagency partners and state Governor Offices.
5. Coordinate the need for large scale closures, as appropriate.

Fire Business Management

1. Cost accountability will be evaluated on all incidents to ensure safe, cost effective suppression of the incident.
2. Teams with financial expertise will be organized and utilized to assist units who are short of financial resources. Units should not rely on ordering Incident Management Teams to make up for a lack of fire

business capability but should make other plans to meet their fire business needs. Pre-identify Financial Support and Business Management modules to assist local units as needed.

3. Agency Administrators will provide financial oversight of incidents under their jurisdiction by maintaining daily dialog with Incident Management Teams and fire management officers during incident decision-making processes, and give clear direction concerning suppression cost containment.

4. Follow NRCG budget guidelines and business practices.

5. A suppression cost objective will be included as an incident objective in the Delegation of Authority to Incident Commanders.

6. Cost-effective management of resources will be monitored at the geographic level and areas of concern will be brought to the attention of Agency Administrators through established chain of command.

7. Agency Administrators should utilize Incident Business Advisors (IBAs) as appropriate, to assist with cost management. Assign an IBA for any fire projected suppression costs of >\$1 million.

8. Consider use of Contracting Officer Technical Representatives (COTRs) in the Northern Rockies to assist agency administrators and teams in the management of contract resources.

9. Agency Administrator will provide oversight for Cost Share Agreements to ensure a fair and equitable disbursement of costs.

Fire Cost Tickler List

- Ensure incident response is commensurate with values at risk.
- Review and evaluate management efficiencies.
- Fund preparedness resources to maintain an efficient Initial Attack organization.
- Prioritize suppression objectives. When resources are short, concentrate on protecting life and values at risk.
- Maintain daily dialog between IMT, FMO and Agency Administrators.
- Manage a fire at appropriate complexity level.
- Manage the risk and resources by utilizing available incident decision support tools.
- Initial and Extended Attack is the key to large fire costs.
- Regional oversight is critical for WFDSS inputs and development of team delegations. Are objective realistic?
- Consider the best tools for the job. Equipment, use, water handling and night operations.
- Better predictive services tools – when is the season going to end? Will help us in our risk assessment.
- When contract resources are ineffective, demobilization them immediately with coordination through COTR's utilized to assist IMT's.
- Manage aviation resources for effectiveness and efficiency. Demobilization if resource is not needed.
- Consider cost when prioritizing the release of resources.
- Minimize the use of motels and other travel costs when mobilizing resources.
- Use more spike camps to reduce travel and aviation time on incidents.
- Minimize holding of resources on incidents for "what if?" situations.
- Evaluate the need for expensive equipment and support on incidents. Release these resources.
- Better manage supply requests.
- Manage re-supply requests (See supplement to Chapter 30).
- Educate line personnel on the use of available equipment (forwarders, skidders, excavators, skidgines, dozers, clippers, masticators, etc.).
- Monitor use of specialized equipment, demobilization or remove from pay status when not needed.
- Evaluate the amount of equipment in staging.
- Evaluate name requests when local resources are available.
- Coordinate with Agency Administrators to support mobilization of home unit resources.
- Increase intermediate supervision (strike team/ task force leaders).
- Improve coordination and management of resources on multi-team incidents to prevent inefficient use of critical resources.
- Consider the extension of personnel assigned to 21 days when fatigue can be managed and cost efficiencies may be gained.
- Manage the use/need of rental vehicles for teams and overhead.
- Agency cell phones (provided by home unit) and personal cell phone costs should not be reimbursed. Exceptions may apply but must be documented and approved by the Incident Agency Administrator.

- Work with municipalities to develop/establish fuel breaks when appropriate.
- Monitor suppression resources on large fires to assess degree to which they are productively engaged.
- Define criteria during which suppression responses would occur (time of year; expected weather changes).
- Maintain liaison with National MAC as situation warrants.
- Maintain liaison with Regional HLS/FEMA as situation warrants.

The Northern Rockies Coordinating Group is committed to work together to provide oversight, leadership and support throughout the Northern Rockies for all agencies. Safety of our fire personnel in managing incidents is the highest priority.

APPENDIX 1
NRCG DECISION SUPPORT CRITERIA DEFINITIONS
for the next 24 hour period

GOAL LEVEL Incident/Resource Prioritization:

LEVEL 2:

Values at Risk

- What consequences (values) are affected by not taking action?
- Mitigation measures should be considered in the analysis of the Level 3 elements.
- Structural Fire Department Jurisdiction?

Probability of Success

- What's the potential for our management action to be successful?

Success is defined as

- achieving objectives for planned actions.

LEVEL 3:

Communities

- The threat that a fire will potentially enter any legally defined city or town.
- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Infrastructure

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy municipal watersheds, power lines, bridges, etc.

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Commercial

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy businesses (this can include commercially important timber and range values).

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Historic and Cultural Resource

- The threat that a fire will potentially destroy significant historic or cultural resources.
- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Principal Residence

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy year-round homes.

Mitigation measures should be considered in the analysis.

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Secondary Residence and out buildings

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy seasonal homes, cabins, outbuildings, barns, etc.

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Natural Resources

The threat that a fire will potentially adversely impact forest and grasslands, wildlife, non-municipal watershed, view sheds, sage grouse habitat, etc.

- High: There is a potential (80% or greater) of significant unacceptable resource damage.
- Moderate: There is a moderate potential (40% or greater) of several resource values being unacceptably impacted.
- Low: The impacts to the resource are within acceptable limits.

Meeting Incident Objectives

Probability of meeting incident/MAP objectives in a given fuel type:

Effectiveness of resources. Fuel type used as a guide.

- Low (Fuel Models 8-13)
- Moderate (Fuel Model 4-7)
- High (Fuel Models 1-3)

Expected Fire Behavior

Fire behavior expected in next 24 hours.

- Low
- Low to moderate
- Moderate to active
- Active to very active
- Very active to extreme

Resource Availability

- Resource needs can be met within timeframes required.
- Yes
- Maybe
- No