

2023 NRCG Fall Meeting *Notes*

November 7-8, 2023 | *Hybrid Meeting*
Pintler Room – Northern Rockies Training Center, Missoula, MT

Tuesday, November 7, 2023 - General Session

Welcome and Introductions – Bryce Rogers

- **Board Attendance:** Rich Cowger (MT State Fire Chiefs' Association, Chair - Virtual), Bryce Rogers (BIA-RM, Vice-Chair), Darron Williams (BIA-NW), Aaron Thompson (BLM), Dennis Strange (BLM); Neal Beetch (FWS), Josh Harvey (IDL), Brett Lloyd (MT DES), Matt Hall (DNRC), Adriane Beck (MT County Fire Wardens Association), Steve Holton (MT Sheriffs & Peace Officers Association – Virtual), Hunter Noor (ND Forest Service – Virtual), Craig Glazier (USFS)
- **Others:** Karly DeMars (BLM, Facilitator), Aitor Bidaburu (NRCD Liaison), Chad Pickering (USFS), Corey Buhl (NR Ops), Jeni Jeresek (USFS – Virtual), Jason Jarrett (virtual), Kathy Pipkin (NRCC), Kate Holsapple (NRCC), Matt Heisler (USFS – Fire Training Committee), Jordan McKnight (USFS), Don Pyrah (DNRC – virtual), Paul Roose (USFS – virtual), Nate Stephens (USFS – virtual)

National Update and Report – Aitor Bidaburu

- NMAC AAR on CIM was completed the Week of October 30, 2023. The group received valuable feedback from many groups. Three themes that kept coming up included:
 - Roster Configuration: confusion within geographic areas on core vs. master mobilization rosters. IWDG settled on a master roster and a mobilization roster (will be reflected in email forthcoming from Jeff Arnberger, NMAC Chair. For 2024, rosters will have 34 core positions plus 6 trainees. The remaining discretionary positions will not have a number. Expect some cleanup on verbiage and rosters to accommodate local government. The Mob guide will include updated rotation and roster configuration.
 - National Rotation: Recommendations included a 3 and 1 out model. One federal agency could not accept this rotation recommendation and did not support. The rotation will change to four geographic areas up at one time. During peak fire season (May through September) four CIMTs will be up on national rotation.
 - National rotation begins January 1; only two teams available each week in shoulder teams. Each geographic area is expected to maintain internal GA rotation.
 - Aaron Thompson shared the successes of the NR GA and national rotation. IWDG proposed 3&1 model; that model was to balance the entire national playing field to fully exercise all teams and to level the playing field.
 - Group received positive feedback on the seven days unavailability period implemented in 2023.
 - Pathways and training to competency: NWCG is developing basic and advanced IMT courses. Basic is expected to be done in late 2024 and advanced in late 2025. The field evaluation process is still a bridge to get responders to CIM being and will remain in place until these training are developed.

NR Operations Fall Report - Corey Buhl

- Northern Rockies provided Canadian support this season. Many crews and responders were very thankful they could drive.
- The Type 3 IMTs were a huge success in Northern Rockies. We just need more of them. NR hosted several out of GACC IMT3's. Martin's team might need some help to build out team – they were able to respond effectively but could use more depth.
- NMAC discussion revolving around CIM and rotation – Corey expressed concern over resource availability and asked Aitor to not lose sight of overall resource availability (particularly crews). The

relatively low amount of fire activity nationally drained the crew resources. NR will continue to implement surge resource capabilities, when possible. It is a very effective tactic for crew availability in NR that works well.

- Another great success, it helped to have NRCG BOD on call during the core season to enhance the coordination. At PL3, it is critical to have the BOD on call person. The coordination really helped to ensure we assigned the right team to the right incident, and we need to continue to allow autonomy to fill CIM orders.
- Smokejumper resource was used appropriately. NR boosted Northern California a lot this year due to many inaccessible fires during IA.
- There was a unique challenge operationally, with the prescribed fire push from federal agencies. There were issues with a unit requesting Type 1 crews for RX during fire season. USFS Director put RX fire on the same plane as suppression – how are we going to work in interagency fashion with interagency. NMAC did a great job at prioritizing (ex: suppression, international, RX) – NRCC was looking for expectations from NRCG BOD
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Develop direction on prioritizing resources to balance suppression and prescribed fire during core fire season in the Northern Rockies. (*Action Item #10*)
- Lastly, we need to push functional complexity assessment back to the AAs and ensure they are using the tool appropriately and ordering what they need.

NRCC Fall Report (Kathy Pipkin)

- Staffing: We had two employees take details for the season but were able to do some quick shuffling to fill roles. Had great detailers for intel and aviation.
- While we stayed at PL 3, July 21-Sept 5, there were a few times when running numbers that we were at a high 3. Instituted daily updates to BOD to keep everyone in the loop. Had we gone any higher in PL, we would have needed to bring in a PIO. Kathy was able to keep up on the report outs.
- Volume of Business: Below normal average, NRCC was only seeing orders when resources were available. Averages for each agency ran steady no matter the volume. Fire numbers – below average for acres and number of occurrences. Statistics will be rolled into financial plan and data has been shared with Jeni.
- Kathy thanked the BOD for having a GMAC rep in PL 3 and encouraged every BOD member to sign up for a week in 2024. Duties of BOD member are listed in the MAC plan but in reality is more of a duty officer for Coordinating Group
- Zone calls were helpful and a huge benefit as Kathy was able to see if their planning was working. Helped to know what they had available locally for IA. Kudos for NW MT and SW MT zones for including NRCC.
- Fall Center Manager Meeting was last week.
 - Kathy mentioned the USFS IADP waiver is going to end January 1, 2024. One dispatch center had to shut down aircraft for four days due to only having one qualified individual and that person needed to be gone. Dispatch Centers are looking to formalize an Aircraft Operations SOP when neighbor centers are involved. Currently, not all dispatch centers can take on aircraft capabilities. Bitterroot and Grangeville need to move over to digital radio systems. In NR there are only 15 qualified Aircraft Dispatchers. Only one center was fully staffed for the season. No new dispatchers, only bringing new individuals. 38% vacant in all dispatches.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Determine if an official tasking to the NRCG Dispatch Committee is needed to develop short-term and long-term SOPs between centers to organize aircraft dispatching operations. Assigned to Craig Glazier. (*Action Item #7*)
- 0456 series – dispatch has been accepted into the series. DOI removed the 90-day required selective factor for recruitment. USFS is likely to follow DOI. Emails to opt-in/out for 0456 series are going out the week.
- The National Coordination Committee under NWCG is working to put together a national interagency dispatch academy (basic, intermediate, and advanced).
- Frequencies will be integrated into database in IRWIN and will populate appropriate systems .
- All but two centers have transitioned to WildCAD-E, which is a cloud-based dispatching/tracking system. Miles City and Billings are the two that need to transition and are transitioning this week.

- Public internet for NRCC and NRTC – all equipment is here, but not yet set up.
- Hosted the NRCC AAR last week. Mobilization Guide edits will be due April 1, 2024. Chapter 90 directory updates are Due April 15, 2024.
- AFD Facilities: NRCC asked for more outdoor lighting around the center. There will be an active shooter training on February 15, 2024.

NRCG Financial Plan (Jeni Jeresek)

- For FY24, would appreciate getting agency signatures much quicker. A draft financial plan is in place based on what we have used in the past – which includes volume of business report, NRTC report, and agency contributions (salaries). Statistics are on a 10-year average and percentages have only changed less than a percentage over the 10-year period analyzed. ND would like to contribute 0.8% in 2024.
- Question – are all agencies contributing and paying their amount? On behalf of BLM, DNRC is paying their share. The BOD needs to ensure that each agency is upholding the established agreement and paying their annual amount.
- **DECISION/ACTION ITEM:** The financially contributing agencies voted to continue with the current NRCG Financial Plan methodologies and would like Jeni Jeresek to move forward with the current process. Agencies will need to submit their updated contribution information by January 15, 2024. (*Action Item #13*)

NRK Cache (Anthony Krause)

- Although they are fully staffed, they are experiencing significant wage grade issues. GS-5 are hard to fill in Missoula. There is a proposal to standardize position descriptions for cache positions.
- While one cache building at a remote location will be dismantled and moved to the main cache location, they will have all the same types of items, just less available to supply. With the warehouse move, the main cache will also gain a paved parking lot for their semis.
- Prescribed fire support: The cache does not have a huge amount of staffing, but they are trying to accommodate prescribed fire efforts. Unfortunately, NRK will likely not have capacity to support prescribed fire chainsaw repairs due to staffing and suppression workload.
- It was well received that every MARK 3 pump coming from NRK had the fish strainer included.
- Success and challenges of fleet. Fleet is a challenge due to usage reports. Renting fleet is not an easy fix. Challenge for to get new drivers, even with recruitment efforts. The increasing training and administrative requirements for ADs is getting tougher to maintain that pool of qualified drivers.

Northern Rockies Training Center (Melissa Wegner)

- Melissa reported that NRTC added two new classes to their course schedule for 2023-2024. (D-310, L-381 will be hosted on the east side)
- With the NRCG cost share – NRTC would gladly host an additional training specialist position!
- Priority Trainee Program:
 - Background: In the spring of 2022, BOD acknowledged that all trainees as priority trainees, which continued into 2023. Melissa works with Beau Richardson when other GAs and IMTs are looking for trainees.
 - Melissa is meeting with IWDG members Jesse Bender and Chuck Russell to discuss priority trainees. CIMTs may be able to assign a set number of priority trainees on their rosters. There is a need in Northern Rockies to standardize availability of Priority Trainees. Melissa is looking for ways to use the priority trainee program for FEMA incidents and prescribed fire report. The BOD discussed what successional planning means within Priority Training Program? Moving forward, the standardization of the Priority Trainee Program will likely be implemented next year.

NR Dispatch Improvement Tasking Update (Craig Glazier)

- Craig Glazier updated the group on the status of the Northern Rockies dispatch improvement effort. He explained that there is no longer a coordinator position as the funding is no longer available.

- The current committee members are Kirsten Kaiser (BLM), Chris Poleski (DNRC), Nate Rogers/Jeremiah Miller (IDL), Molly Ryan (USFS), Corey Buhl (NR Operations), and Craig Glazier (USFS).
- The NRCG BOD discussed the need for agency buy-off from members to agree that we have too many centers and voted to support the Dispatch Review committee in their continued efforts (original taskings) and provide recommendations.
- **DECISION:** The NRCG Board of Directors acknowledged that the ultimate outcome would be to close some centers. This recommendation would be forwarded to the WFAA group. All agencies present at the meeting were in support of the recommendation, except for Idaho Department of Lands, who abstained from the vote due to not enough information. Table 1 lists the decision and agency vote.

Decision: Support to allow Dispatch Review committee to continue their work (original taskings) and provide recommendations. Acknowledging ultimate outcome would be to close some centers. This recommendation would be forwarded to WFAAs.			
	\$	Agency	Agency Support / Vote
1	\$	BIA	Supports
2	\$	BLM	Supports
3	\$	FWS	Supports
4	\$	IDL	Abstained, not enough information
5	\$	MT DNRC	Supports
6	\$	ND	Supports
7	\$	NPS	Not present
8	\$	USFS	Supports
9		MT DES	Supports
10		State Fire Chief's Association	Not present
11		Montana County Fire Wardens	Supports
12		Montana Sheriff's & Peace Officers	Not present

Table 1: Decision to support dispatch improvement efforts.

Review of Committee & Zone Report Outs

- Committee reports were received prior to the meeting and were distributed to the BOD. Reports were received from the Dispatch Committee, Operations Committee, Fire Business, Fire Training, and Incident Commanders. The Mitigation/Education Committee was meeting at the same time as the BOD and will provide a report for the December monthly BOD meeting.
 - **DECISION:** The NRCG BOD approved the updated Fire Business Committee charter unanimously.

Board Liaison Representation & Expectations

- The Board of Directors reviewed the current Board Liaisons to Committees and Zones document. All liaisons to committees and zones will remain the same except for the Liaison to the Training Committee.
 - **DECISION:** Dennis Strange will replace Josh Harvey as the Training Committee Liaison.
- NRCG BOD discussed their expectations of the Liaisons as well as the committees. The BOD would like to start rotating committee report outs at monthly meetings and to use the committees in the functions they were designed. The BOD plans to empower committees to do the work of the coordinating group. The BOD will look at tasking each group with appropriate tasks. Currently, there are expectations outlined in the GMAC handbook.
 - **DECISION:** The monthly meeting agendas will include a standing agenda item where two (2) committee liaisons (or committee chairs) will give a committee update. This was an agreed upon expectation made by the BOD. For example, a report out rotation could look like:
 - December/March/July: Mitigation/Education Committee; IC Committee
 - January/May/August: Dispatch Committee; Operations Committee
 - February/June/September: Training Committee; Business Committee
 - All committees - April and November (face-to-face meetings)
 - **ACTION ITEM:** The BOD will develop and communicate the monthly report out rotation. (which committee will report and when – see example above) (*Action Item #1*)
 - **ACTION ITEM:** The BOD will review current expectations. Once reviewed/updated, they will communicate with each committee via memo. Report back by February 2024. (*Action Item #6*)

- Discussion: Are the committees made up of the right people? Liaisons need to review the committee membership and ensure there is adequate subject matter expert and agency representation.

Utilizing Firenet for NRCG Committee's and Zones (Kathy Pipkin)

Kathy requested that the BOD allow her to set up Zone and Committee Channels within the NRCG_Coordinating Group Microsoft Team to facilitate increased communication and a longer standing document library/document tracking system. The BOD supported this effort but asked that Kathy reach out to each zone and committee to see if they would be on board. Kathy will report back to the BOD via email with her findings before this action is implemented.

NRCC Manager Transition Plan & Expectations

With the transition between Kathy and Kate, the BOD would like to ensure there is adequate support and direction from the BOD. Kathy and Kate mentioned they have already been working on updating the current delegation. The BOD plans to schedule a meeting with Kate and Corey in January to walk through expectations for each agency and to review of delegation of authority.

- **ACTION ITEM:** Delegations need to be finished prior to meeting in January. Also, supervision of employee delegations are separate and need to be updated. Consider updating prioritization for RX. Edits to the delegation by the end of December 31. Finalize in January 2024, meet in February 2024. (*Action Item #4*)

Backup for NR Operations Position

This topic was brought forward to review how the 2023 memo for NR Operations backups and to discuss its implementation. Overall, consensus was that the memo was not followed. Partly because the individuals listed within the memo as backups were unavailable at the time of need. Corey Buhl reported that the individuals listed are usually busy with local fire support due to their skillsets. During discussions, some ideas to provide consistent and reliable backups for this position include:

- Developing a set schedule where individuals would commit to an 'assignment' or have an 'on call' backup schedule with agency expectation to be available.
- Develop a guide or SOP for the position that lists needed skillsets, tasks, etc. Some skillsets that are very valuable included Duty Officer experience, understanding of interagency environment.
- Define agency duty officers/single POCs that Corey could coordinate with (i.e. have 7-8 primary POCs)
- Could have a second person to come in and shadow during PL3 (Operations Specialist)
- **ACTION ITEM:** Review delegation memo and update as appropriate. Develop and/or decide if an SOP document for the position is needed. (*Action Item #11*)

CIMT Transition & IMT3 Review/Update (Kathy Pipkin)

- Review of 2023
 - Received over 700 applications for IMTs. During the application process, applicants were asked to only apply for one team. From the applications, NR was able to provide a pool for type 3 and CIMT. Selections were completed by the end of February 2023. The iCAP application portal had significant flaws. For 2024, NR will be using an MS form for IMT applications.
 - NRCC successfully transitioned all Type 1 and Type 2 IMTs to CIMT. CIMT began availability on April 4, with the first assignment in May. The Type 3 rotation started in June with the first assignment July 4. All teams had a minimum of two assignments.
 - NR was frequently in national rotation, which was confusing to many.
 - NRCC opened the application process for ICs, Deputies and trainees in October.
 - 2023 IMT Assignment Evaluations have been posted in Firenet. There were no negative evaluations received.
 - IMT Successes/Challenges
 - Successes: Beau did a great job at communicating with team ICs throughout the season. Going down to five teams was a huge success.
 - Challenges: iCAP application program was flawed/hard to use

- Issues with Ad hoc team protocols. Due to mobilization to Canada, the entire IMT was taken out of the rotation.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** NRCG BOD will develop ad hoc team protocols when a short IMT is ordered to define what the rest of the IMT will do if only a small number of team members are ordered. Assigned to IC Committee/Paul Cerda, Liaison and Beau Richardson. (*Action Item #9*)
- 2024 IMT Application Process & Timeline: New applicants will be able to apply in December/January. Current IMT members will not need to apply. Selections will take place in February.
 - DECISION: NR will open up application process for Deputy ICs and IC trainees during the December 2023/January 2024 recruitment period (this will be the same application period for general IMT recruitment)
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Because all NR teams applied in 2023, the BOD needs to determine the next steps for IMT Recruitment and Application Process. This could be completed by developing a rotation of each team that must apply (tied to IC tenure/commitment timeframes) or all teams could reapply annually. Assigned to C Committee/Paul Cerda, Liaison and Beau Richardson. (*Action Item #8*)
- Process for IC, Deputy IC and IC Trainee approval: In 2023, there were issues of IC trainees that aren't vetted through the BOD and took trainee assignments. The BOD plans to remind IC group that IC trainees on IMTs need to be approved by NRCG BOD. Additionally, when the NRCC IMT Coordinator sees issues, they need to update the BOD Chair to help resolve issues. The NRCG BOD would also like a list of approved ICs, Deputy ICs and IC trainees. There were no applications for ICs, Deputy ICs or IC trainees received during the October 2023 recruitment period.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Provide expectations to IC group that all ICs, deputies and trainees need to be vetted by NRCG. Assigned to IC Committee Liaison. (*Action Item #2*)
- Financial Support for NR CIMTs:
 - Discussed Starlink and the need for each team to have access to one or two units.
 - Need to ensure agencies are completing purchase for assigned IMTs.
- IMT Incentives: The BOD is looking for ideas to recognize and incentivizes IMT members for their service.

NRCG BOD Program Support Specialist (Craig Glazier)

While Pam Jolly is on a detail, the NRCG BOD will need a meeting facilitator for a four-month period to fill behind Pam. If the position is vacated in the future, it will likely not be filled due to the changing workload priorities of the USFS Program Support Specialist position.

- In the short-term, Montana DES may have an individual with interest in filling in for four-months. BLM has also offered to help support the interim facilitator while Pam is out.
- In the long-term, the BOD could solicit applications for a two-year volunteer/collateral duty Meeting Facilitator/Executive Assistant. This could be a developmental position for individuals looking to learn/hone facilitation skills. It was suggested to have a primary facilitator as well as a co-assistant that would fill the role on a two-year term.
- Primary tasks included agenda coordination and development; scheduling meetings; taking notes and posting to website; keeping track of action items and progress; preparation of memos and board documents. One potential challenge is access to post external documents on the website.

NRCC Intel Product Discussion (Aaron Thompson)

Discussion regarding current intelligence products. For example, it was requested that 'News and Notes' be produced in Northern Rockies. Kate responded that 'News and Notes' is very labor intensive and is difficult to keep up in PL 4 and 5. A suggestion to work with DNRC regarding their fire situation dashboard. Using a PIO during increased activity would also help to get information out quicker.

Wednesday, November 8, 2023 - General Session

Opening/Bin Items Discussion

- IMT Aaron Thompson brought up the need to further recognize IMTs with non-monetary awards. He suggested procuring a coffee mug or travel cup with all NR IMT logos to give to team members – but the BOD would need to develop parameters of who would receive the award/recognition.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** The BOD requested to add an action item to a) develop a entire team non-monetary award and b) revitalize the existing awards program – as outlined on the NRCG website. Task will be led by Aaron Thompson. (*Action Item #5*)

Montana Ties to Local Government Overview (Matt Hall/Cory Calnan)

Cory Calnan presented a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation is available in NR_Coordinating Group Team under the 2023-Fall-NRCG-Meeting folder. Some questions arose from the presentation including if all Montana counties have dedicated fire wardens – yes they do. Cory also explained how affidavit lands work in Montana.

NRCG Board Charter Update (Rich Cowger/Bryce Rogers)

Prior to the meeting, BOD members were asked to review the current draft charter. During discussion, it was asked about representation of other ID and ND state government entities. Do we need to have a written agreement that MT would represent ID and ND state government entities? Additionally, the majority felt the BOD would address any additional requests for representation at the time of request.

After additional discussion, the BOD members proposed the following updates to the Charter Update Task group.

- Define who the board of directors are vs the NR Coordinating Group members? It is not clear in the current version, but many felt the BOD would be the financially responsible agencies (USFS, BIA, BLM, FWS, IDL, MT-DNRC, ND Forest Service, NPS) while the coordinating group would be the agencies that provide jurisdictional responsibility. Some felt the BOD and Coordinating Group are the same membership.
- List the financial entities in the charter document.
- Determine the voting membership of coordinating group.
- Add financial responsibilities each BOD members bring for NRCC/NRTC financial plan. Ensure during MAC that the financial decision required by that agency is involved. Review NRCG Operating Guide to make sure the direction is coordinated.
- Outline the responsibilities of the Program Support Specialist/Meeting Coordinator-Facilitator.

ACTION ITEM: Discussion to occur at Executive BOD session in January. Draft for BOD review by January 16, 2024, monthly meeting; final for approval by February 20, 2024 monthly meeting. (*Action Item #3*)

CGAC Representation Expectations (Bryce Rogers)

In 2022, Craig Glazier was appointed as the NRCG BOD representative to CGAC. He has been attending. The NRCC Manager also attends these meetings as they are chart under CGAC. The group discussed defining the expectations of the NRCG representative.

DECISION/ACTION ITEM: The NRCG BOD representative to CGAC will fill a two-year term. If not available, Craig will find a BOD replacement. NRCC Manager will attend as a participant of the Center Manager Group. Expectation is that meeting notes and taskings are emailed to BOD members. Standing NRCG agenda topic continues. All BOD members agreed. Will add this designation to the 'NRCG Board Liaisons to Committees and Zones' document. (*Action Item #12*)

Northwestern Energy Intel Sharing Proposal (Bryce Rogers)

This is a follow-up item from the October monthly BOD meeting. NRCC already has a process to notify/share information from cameras and incoming reported information. The BOD would like to encourage NWE to tie in with local dispatch centers and NRCC. Kate Holsapple will reach out to NWE to pursue options.

Remote Incident Support Team Update – Morganne Lehr

Morganne Lehr joined virtually to share 2023 RIST statistics. Billy Phillips is the National RIST Coordinator supported by Northern Rockies/R1 USFS and Morganne Lehr is the Deputy National RIST Coordinator supported by R5 USFS.

NRCG Spring / Fall 2024 Meeting Dates

- The Spring 2024 meeting date will be held April 8-12, 2024 in Missoula. These dates coincide with the Northern Rockies IMT Meetings and allows the BOD to be present and available for the IMT meeting and to address the attendees during a general session.
- The Fall 2024 meeting will be held the week of November 4-8, 2024, with location to be determined. The meeting will likely be three days to allow the committee to use the time to finalize decisions and work on tasks.

An official memo will be completed, and calendar invitations will be sent to BOD members.

Bin Items

- Montana DES reported that Kyrsten Brinkly is interested in filling the Executive Assistant role while Pam Jolly is on detail. A follow-up meeting will be set up with Kyrsten and the BOD Chair.