



# Northern Rockies Coordinating Group

Federal, State, and Local Government Agencies Working Together in Emergency Response Management

## Monthly Conference Call – Meeting NOTES

Tuesday, December 16, 2025 – 10:00 AM MST

### Participants

#### **Coordinating Group Members:**

	BIA – Great Plains	Heath Estey	X	Idaho Department of Lands	Josh Harvey
X	BIA – Rocky Mountain	Bryce Rogers		North Dakota Forest Service	Ryan Melin
X	BIA – Northwest Region	Brad Donahue	X	Montana DNRC	Matt Hall
X	BLM – Montana/Dakotas	Aaron Thompson	X	Montana County Fire Wardens	Patrick Lonergan
X	BLM – Idaho	Dennis Strange		Montana DES	Brett Lloyd
X	NPS – Intermountain Region	Paul Cerda		Montana Sheriff's & Peace Officers	Steve Holton
X	USFS – Region 1	Craig Glazier	X	Montana Fire Chiefs Association	Rich Cowger
X	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	Tate Fischer	X	Facilitator	Karly DeMars

**Deputies and Others:** Corey Buhl (NR Operations), Adriane Beck (MT County Fire Wardens), Brian Nickolay (MT Fire Chief's Association), Jason Jarrett (Montana Sheriff's & Peace Officers), Morganne Lehr (Facilitator Backup), Beau Richardson (NRCC)

**NR Contracting Updates** | Brian Webber provided an update on Northern Rockies contracting operations, with a focus on VIPR, equipment solicitations, and lessons learned from the 2025 season. Currently, VIPR includes 569 vendors and 2,939 individual pieces of equipment, including 192 engines and a significant number of excavators (337). Spring efforts centered on technical evaluations, revised solicitations, and onboarding approximately 1,195 individual equipment items. The region maintains 41 MOUs for training, supported by four verification companies, and has received positive feedback from the contracting community regarding improved clarity and consistency in contracting decisions.

- Significant system and process changes are forthcoming. The VIPR system will be replaced in 2026 due to USDA ending support for Oracle, with contracting operations actively working with programmers to ensure solicitations can begin by early February. Several equipment categories will move to Dispatch Priority Lists (DPLs) to streamline processes, including vehicles with drivers (eliminating the need for individual EERAs), UTVs (migrating from OHV/EERA to VIPR DPL), REMS teams (new to VIPR and DPL-based), and reopened fuel truck solicitations, including a Type 4 fuel truck with a 1,000-gallon capacity better suited for camp operations and non-ethanol fuel.
- The 2025 season review highlighted issues related to equipment breakdowns, harassment incidents, and clarification of contract scope—particularly regarding HETF and task force composition. There is potential for a national verifier process in 2027–2028 being explored by the WO Contracting Operations Group, modeled after Geographic Area verifier systems. Brian emphasized the importance of rumor control and encouraged routing questions directly to him. Additionally, a State of Montana study related to these issues is currently underway.
- **DECISION** | After discussion, the current direction titled Use and Supervision of Privately Owned Equipment on Incidents (10/20/2017) will be rescinded and removed from the NRCG webpage as it no longer is relevant. All agencies supported the rescission unanimously.

### **Standing Reports**

- **NMAC Update** (Aitor Bidaburu) – *submitted via email.*
  - 38 CIMTs nationally, a reduction of three from last year.
  - NMAC is getting ready to issue National Rotation guidance very soon as draft for review and feedback from CGAC. Fatal flaw type review.
  - NMAC to coordinate NMAC/CGAC Winter meeting dates in the very near future – Chuck Russell has the lead as the rep to CGAC.
  - ESF4 activated for flooding in Washington – one DNR CIMT deployed and a Saw Module for anticipated road opening requirements.
  - NICC is periodically checking in with Australia, some activity picking up but nothing being asked for or anticipated soon.

- **CGAC Report Out** (Dennis Strange) – no meeting in November, December meeting was cancelled. Suggestions and feedback from October meeting were submitted to NMAC.
- **NRCC Operations** (Corey Buhl) – During the early December Incident Commander Committee meeting, ICs agreed to maintain internal rotation within the Northern Rockies. The group acknowledged the need for flexibility, including potential mobilization adjustments, to address rotation conflicts as they arise. ICs committed to handling any necessary rotation changes internally and collaboratively. Corey Buhl indicated this approach is manageable given the current cadre of four ICs, including Beau.
- **NRCC Update** (Beau Richardson for Kate Holsapple) – NRCC reported progress on staffing, including the ability to hire on the Forest Service side and fill the Assistant Aircraft Coordinator position, though the hire has not yet been announced. Several staff attended the National Coordinators Meeting in Denver in recent weeks. The center is awaiting additional changes in the new year associated with the transition to USWFS. Abnormal weather conditions have driven increased activity, with the Pacific Northwest activating an ESF-4 response and submitting requests for suppression modules, including 10-person crews for saw work and access road preparation.
- **NRCG Committee Updates**
  - **Prevention & Education Committee** | Matt Hall reported the committee met last week, but was unable to attend. A follow-up with the Chair is scheduled this week. Coordination is underway with Prevention and Education staff on planning efforts for next year, including early discussions around Wildfire Awareness Month and prevention activities.
    - **ACTION ITEM:** NRCG needs to work to ensure agency representation and participation.
  - **IC Committee:** Craig Glazier attended meeting. Limited updates; discussion focused on IC rotation and potential ways to support rebuilding team capacity. Most ideas discussed are not feasible at this time. An effort to roster an additional Type 3 team was unsuccessful.

### **Unfinished Business**

- **IMT SOP/Team Plan Status** | Beau Richardson reported the 2026 Team Plan is on hold pending any changes related to team configuration, rotation, or relevant NMAC memos and Mobilization Guide updates. Finalization is targeted for early to mid-March to allow adequate time for team updates.
- **Status of IMT Recruitment** | Beau reported recruitment is progressing well, with nearly 400 applicants as of December 16. The previous full recruitment cycle had approximately 700 total applicants. Current distribution is relatively even across CIMTs, with approximately 330 CIM applicants and 54 applicants for Type 3 teams.

### **New Business**

- Committee Taskings Discussion
  - **Incident Management Team Capacity Recommendations (CY 2026–2028)** | Aaron Thompson presented the recommended tasking document. Discussion emphasized revising wording to encourage creative, open-minded brainstorming while acknowledging known constraints, including the continued reliance on a volunteer IMT workforce during the USWFS transition and USFS realignment.
    - **DECISION:** The group recognized that standing up a Type 3 IMT for 2026 would be challenging and agreed to shift the primary target to CY 2027, with planning and initial implementation/organization beginning in 2026. Clarification will be added that NRCG-sponsored teams will be funded by NRCG agencies, consistent with other sponsored teams. Despite concerns about timing, the reporting deadline will remain March 1, with the timeline adjusted to CY 2027.
  - **DECISION | Operations Committee / IC Committee Realignment** - The group agreed to pursue reforming the Operations Committee, with the Incident Commander Committee realigned as a subcommittee/SME group under Operations. The Operations Committee will focus on NRCG agency preparedness and suppression operations, while the IC Committee will address incident management topics. A NRCG Liaison will still be assigned to the IC Subcommittee to ensure consistency. NRCG Liaisons of the Operations Committee and IC Subcommittee will work closely to ensure communication and coordination are in line with NRCG goals and objectives of the realignment.
  - **ACTION ITEM:** Draft a realignment memo outlining the Ops and IC Committee structure and roles. *(Completed 12/16/2025, with Chair for signature)*. Ensure NRCG Operations Committee and IC Committee Liaisons work with each current committee to understand the alignment memo.

- **ACTION ITEM:** Send/communicate final tasking 'Incident Management Team Capacity Recommendations' to the Operations Committee.
- **ACTION ITEM:** Outline NRCG leadership intent for the Operations Committee, including scope (Agency Preparedness and Suppression Operations) and membership, with each NRCG member agency having one vote.

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, January 20, 2026