



Northern Rockies Coordinating Group

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

Monthly Conference Call – Meeting Notes

Tuesday, February 17, 2026 – 10:00 AM MST

Participants

Coordinating Group Members:

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

Deputies and Others: Aitor Bidaburu, Corey Buhl, Kate Holsapple, Beau Richardson, Morganne Lehr, Melissa Swain, Adriane Beck (MT Co. Fire Wardens)

Special Reports:

- **PROGRAM UPDATE | NR Buying Teams** – Melissa Swain provided an overview of significant national changes to Buying Team operations for the 2026 season. The U.S. Forest Service (FS) has directed that AIMS/Surge groups will no longer function as interagency purchasing teams, and FS contracting will manage its own purchasing and contracting staff moving forward. This decision was made at the FS contracting leadership level and was not coordinated through NWCG. As a result, each agency will be responsible for meeting its own contracting and purchasing needs in 2026. DOI is developing an agency-specific approach, and states may also need to establish independent systems. This change has national implications, including impacts to interagency incidents, potentially tying purchasing responsibility to the wildland fire point of origin agency for the duration of incidents. Written direction has not yet been distributed to business leads; Melissa will follow up regarding formal guidance. The National Incident Business (IB) Chief has elevated the issue to regional IB personnel, and NMAC will discuss the topic at its upcoming meeting. There is interest in elevating a unified interagency memo from the Northern Rockies Geographic Area (NR) to support coordination, potentially aligned with Executive Order direction.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Revisit this topic in March for updates and further direction.

Standing Reports

- **NWCG/NMAC Update:** Aitor Bidaburu shared that the NWCG Executive Board is currently meeting and is reviewing recommendations from the Emergency Medical Committee regarding REMS modules. Four alternatives were presented; current systems will remain in place for 2026, with a formal typing system, training, position task books (PTBs), and supporting documentation anticipated thereafter. Additional items being discussed:
 - There is significant national discussion regarding UTV/OHV use—specifically modifications that may compromise original manufacturer safety design standards. Agencies, contracting, and safety programs are evaluating risks. Tate emphasized that any decisions related to UTV/OHV use must be thoroughly vetted before implementation.
 - NWCG will meet this week with new committee chairs to begin discussions under the revised committee structure and change management framework.

- At NMAC, structural changes are underway with the transition to the U.S. Wildland Fire Service (WFS). The former four-bureau representation model has ended; moving forward, WFS will have one primary representative and one alternate (to be identified within the next month). This represents a significant shift in governance structure. NMAC meets on Friday and will add the Buying Team/contracting issue to the agenda. Chief Fennessey and Chief Fisher will be working closely together throughout the year.
- **CGAC Report Out:** Dennis Strange reported that notes from the January face-to-face meeting were distributed on February 4 via email, including the official meeting notes and posted memos. He expressed appreciation for input provided on the national rotation process. Additionally, it was shared that ICAP will become a required system beginning in 2027 for IMT applications and will be hosted in Firenet.
- **NRCC Operations:** Corey Buhl shared that he has submitted a selection for the NRCC Assistant Center Manager position and hopes to share the name soon.
- **NRCC Update:** Kate reported light fire activity, including an 81-acre fire near on Crow Agency with structures nearby but no additional resource needs. Severe cold temperatures (-15°F) are expected in central Montana. Staffing updates include the Assistant Aircraft Coordinator, Liz Bauer, will start on 3/23; MT DNRC is flying a Coordinator position, which closes March 3; and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are finalizing the Meteorologist classification and hope to advertise the position soon.
 - Kate also highlighted significant IT and infrastructure issues impacting local dispatch centers. Dillon Dispatch has experienced prolonged network outages that required escalation to resolve while resources were in the field. Missoula Dispatch is facing lifecycle replacement issues, receiving outdated laptops to replace desktops, resulting in equipment failures. Coeur d'Alene is reporting major power issues affecting additional console capacity (including facility heating concerns), and the Kootenai Dispatch remodel has displaced staff and created connectivity problems. Concerns were raised that these issues are being reported but not resolved. COOP implementation and reporting processes, particularly for Dillon, were discussed, including travel requirements and broader COOP-related challenges.
- **NRCC Committee Updates:**
 - **Training Committee** (Dennis Strange) – IQCS 2.0 rollout is underway. Current IQCS will be blacked out on 2/26 for migration, with the new system going live on 3/2. The update includes enhanced features and is generally viewed as a positive improvement. Red Card issuance and training entry processes will transition to the new platform.
 - **Business Committee** (Aaron Thompson) – No significant updates. Spring guides and training efforts are in development. Melissa Swain (USFS) is the new committee chair while Brandi Van Kleeck (USWFS/BLM) is the new vice chair.

Unfinished Business

- **DECISION | Approval of IC Trainee Application:** NRCG approved Justin Randall's application as an Incident Commander Trainee (ICCI) for Team 1, with supporting votes from NRCG agencies in attendance.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Send approval letter to applicant and Team 1 Primary IC. (*Assigned to Chair & Facilitator*) – Completed prior to notes being finalized.
- **DECISION | Approval of 2026 IMT Rosters:** The group reviewed the proposed 2026 IMT rosters, noting a few minor adjustments still being finalized. Discussion included mindful use of ADs, emphasizing they should not displace agency employees, and reinforcing this expectation with the IC group. Long-term team development goals were also discussed, including building Command and General Staff depth within three years, with approximately 800 personnel reflected across rosters. NRCG approved the 2026 IMT rosters as submitted on 2/17/2026, with supporting votes from participating agencies.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Draft and distribute memo formally approving the roster. (*Assigned to Chair & Facilitator*) - Completed prior to notes being finalized.

New Business

- **DECISION | Reinstatement of Ronan Dispatch:** Kate Holsapple is seeking NRCG's support and approval to reinstate the Ronan Dispatch Unit Identifier (Unit ID). Ronan Dispatch's Unit ID was deactivated in 2003/2004, likely during a reorganization when Missoula Dispatch Center assumed Tier 3 responsibilities. The proposal seeks to reactivate the existing Unit ID to allow the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and Ronan Dispatch to retain local ownership and maintenance of dispatch applications while continuing to function operationally as a 4th Tier center for initial attack. Aircraft response and expanded dispatch support would remain with Missoula Dispatch. Reactivation would enable Ronan Dispatch to procure an IRWIN-recognized CAD system (WildCADe), manage their own IROC database, and ensure CSKT boundary data populates correctly in national wildland fire systems. Without reinstatement, reliance on Missoula Dispatch for database management would continue. While there will be a learning curve associated with establishing IROC and CAD capabilities, both Missoula Dispatch and the Northern Rockies Coordination Center have committed to assisting. The NWCG Unit Identifier Board requires multi-level approval; the request was initiated by the CSKT FMO through Missoula Dispatch, supported by NRCC and BIA Northwest, and brought forward for full NRCG endorsement. Following discussion regarding tribal dispatch structures and Tier designations, the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group reached consensus to support reinstatement.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Issue a letter of support on behalf of NRCG from the Chair. (*Assigned to Chair & Facilitator*) – Completed prior to notes being finalized.
- **DISCUSSION | Fire Executive / WFAA Group Involvement in Spring (April) NRCG Meeting:** The group discussed whether Fire Executives/WFAAs should be invited to participate in the April NRCG meeting and IMT meeting to better align Agency Administrators and leadership during the transition to the Wildland Fire Service (WFS). Bryce supported continuing to invite Fire Executives, noting they remain land managers and share responsibility in the transition. Dennis expressed concern that the AA/Executive group may be redundant or unclear in purpose, particularly as delegation authorities evolve, and questioned how their involvement would add value. The group concluded with a consensus to formally extend an invitation to the Fire Executive/WFAA group to gauge interest and facilitate discussion.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Each NRCG member will reach out to their respective Fire Executive to invite them to participate in the Spring NRCG and IMT meetings in April.
- **DECISION (Postponed) | Request for date change to NRCG-2026-01 Tasking:** The NRCG Operations Committee will formally submit a request to extend the current March 1, 2026 deliverable deadline. While no specific revised date was provided, a formal timeline proposal will be submitted in the coming weeks.
- **DISCUSSION | April NRCG Meeting Agenda & IMT General Session:** The group discussed agenda priorities and timing for the April NRCG meeting, including expectations for the MAC exercise. Corey requested input on focus areas and learning objectives for the exercise. Tuesday afternoon will include remarks from the NRCG Chair, a general session featuring Sarah Fisher and Brian Fennessey, coordinating group updates, and awards, with the IC Committee assisting in session planning.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Submit MAC exercise focus areas to Corey prior to March 17, 2026.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 17, 2026