Northern Rockies Coordinating Group

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

NRCG Spring Meeting Notes

Location: ***Holiday Inn Downtown (200 S. Pattee Street)*** | **Virtual:** ***Microsoft Teams***

Audience: Northern Rockies Coordinating Group and representatives, Northern Rockies Coordination Center Staff

Tuesday, April 7 and Wednesday, April 8, 2026

Participants

Coordinating Group Members:

X	BIA – Great Plains	Heath Estey	X	Idaho Department of Lands	Josh Harvey
X	BIA – Rocky Mountain	Bryce Rogers		North Dakota Forest Service	~~Ryan Melin~~
	BIA – Northwest Region	~~Brad Donahue~~		Montana DNRC	~~Matt Hall~~
X	BLM – Montana/Dakotas	Aaron Thompson	X	Montana County Fire Wardens	Patrick Lonergan
X	BLM – Idaho	Dennis Strange (virtual)	X	Montana DES	Brett Lloyd (Virtual)
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: Hunter Noor (North Dakota Forest Service), Cory Calnan (Montana DNRC), Aitor Bidaburu (NMAC), Craig Howells (BLM AFMO), Morganne Lehr (Notetaker/Facilitator), Melissa Swain (USFS, Incident Business Committee)

Overview of Meeting | On April 7 and 8, 2026, NRCG convened in Missoula, MT with attendance from NRCG members both in person and virtually. The meeting was held in conjunction with the Northern Rockies Incident Management Team Meeting. The NRCG Annual IMT Leader's Intent address was delivered on Tuesday, April 7 by Chair, Bryce Rogers, during the General Session of the IMT meeting.

TUESDAY, April 7, 2026

Welcome & Introductions | Bryce Rogers welcomed the group and thanked the contingent for their continued work and support for NRCG.

NRGA Cost Share Agreement Review/Approval | Melissa Swain presented the Northern Rockies Geographic Area (NRGA) Cost Share Agreement for review and approval for the 2026 fire season. Feedback from NRCC and participating agencies indicated the agreement has been working well and is meeting operational needs across the geographic area. Discussion also included the potential for future changes, including combining all DOI agencies under a single structure. NRCG financial member agencies represented by BIA, BLM, FWS, IDL, MT DNRC, NPS, and USFS supported approval of the agreement. **ACTION ITEM:** Discuss NRGA Cost Share Agreement methodology and potential future changes at the May meeting.

Status of USWFS Transition & Impacts on NRCG Membership | Discussion focused on the ongoing transition to the U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) and the anticipated impacts to NRCG membership, governance, and coordination structures. Aaron Thompson noted this would be the final meeting with the current DOI representation structure, as the Wildland Fire Service will transition to a single membership seat on NRCG.

The NRGA Fire Chief will serve as the primary NRCG representative, with the deputy serving as backup. Aaron also committed to maintaining quarterly coordination with DOI executives. Participants discussed broader questions surrounding future representation, executive engagement, committee structure, and alignment with the national reorganization occurring under NMAC and CGAC.

The group reviewed implications of NMAC Correspondence L2026-04 and the evolving national coordination structure. Discussion emphasized the importance of continuity and consistent representation at the NMAC level, particularly during higher Preparedness Levels (PL 4 and 5) when meetings may occur daily or multiple times per day. Aitor Bidaburu highlighted that the new structure elevates Geographic Areas directly into NMAC decision-making discussions and reduces delays associated with second- and third-hand information flow. NRCG members agreed the Northern Rockies is well-positioned due to its existing Operations Specialist model. Concerns were raised regarding workload and sustainability, particularly for Corey Buhl, and the need to ensure adequate support moving forward. **DECISION:** Corey Buhl was approved as the Northern Rockies primary Associate Member representative to NMAC. The future USFS Operations position will serve as the alternate/deputy NMAC representative.

Additional discussion focused on broader NRCG modernization efforts associated with the USWFS transition, including reviewing committee structures, reducing redundancy, clarifying liaison roles, evaluating zone expectations, updating the NRCG charter and operating plans, and determining future sponsorship and governance models for CIMTs and committees. The group agreed many of these discussions should continue later in the year once national organizational structures become clearer.

- **DECISION:** Ryan Melin was identified to assume NRCG Chair responsibilities beginning in May 2026 and continue through the 2027–2028 rotation cycle.
- **DECISION:** MT DES will serve as the liaison for NR Team 9.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Review and update the NRCG Charter, Operating Plan, liaison assignments, committee structure, and rotation schedules.
- Continue discussions regarding zone structure, expectations, and future need.
- Evaluate future financial sponsorship models for IMTs under the evolving USWFS structure.
- Identify future committee representation needs, including Training Committee representation for 2026.
- Update NRCG mailing lists and liaison designations.
- Continue monitoring workload and support needs associated with the NMAC Associate Member role.

IMT Health Statistics and Succession Planning Discussion | Morganne provided an overview of Incident Management Team (IMT) health statistics and succession planning data, highlighting trends and changes in roster composition over time. Discussion included changes implemented after 2022 regarding alternate versus discretionary roster positions, as well as current workforce composition data showing 520 AD positions compared to 221 career positions and 522 qualified personnel compared to 223 trainees. The group also reviewed historical trends in the number of teams and noted that overall roster numbers have continued to increase over time. Succession planning efforts and the development of formal succession plans were also discussed.

Dennis Strange emphasized the importance of recognizing IMTs as a volunteer-based organization and noted that the committee continues to actively evaluate long-term sustainability and workforce development considerations. Additional discussion included questions regarding the percentage of job-share positions represented on rosters and whether changes involving land management agency participation may impact future team staffing and capacity.

ACTION ITEM: Continue assessing IMT health through: continue evaluating IMT succession planning and long-term workforce sustainability; assess the percentage and effectiveness of job-share positions on IMT rosters; and monitor potential impacts to IMT participation from land management agency workforce changes.

Operations Committee Tasking Update | Craig Howells provided an update on the Operations Committee tasking related to Incident Management Team (IMT) Capacity Recommendations for CY 2026–2028. Discussion focused on several strategic initiatives intended to strengthen IMT capacity across the Northern Rockies. The group reviewed the proposal to open a special recruitment period for a Type 3 Incident Commander (ICT3), allowing sufficient time for the selected IC to develop a team capable of applying for official team status in January 2027.

The committee also discussed opportunities to transition existing Type 3 teams into Complex Incident Management Teams (CIMTs). Team 9 indicated they are not interested in transitioning to CIMT, while Team 8 expressed willingness to continue discussions. CAT and SW All Hazard teams also indicated they were not interested at this time. Participants acknowledged that transitioning an existing team to CIMT status is not currently realistic and that developing additional Type 3 team capacity may be a more achievable near-term objective. Tasking discussions also included standing up one to two additional Type 3 teams, with IDL indicating it may be positioned to support that effort within the next two years.

The group discussed the need for additional survey input to better understand barriers to participation and long-term sustainability within the IMT system. Key limiting factors identified included disparities in AD pay for Type 3 positions, as well as broader intangible considerations such as workload, team utilization, family impacts, and volunteer commitment. Members emphasized that NRCG should take a stronger leadership role in sharing recruitment and engagement messaging beyond traditional IMT audiences, including militia, dispatch, and broader agency personnel. Josh Harvey also noted ongoing efforts within Idaho to establish an IDL interagency Type 3 team and highlighted increasing complexity on incidents being managed by Type 3 organizations.

The Operations Committee task group will remain active to continue collecting survey responses and evaluating IMT capacity recommendations.

DECISION: NRCG supported opening a special recruitment period for a Type 3 Incident Commander in April 2026, with selection anticipated in May 2026. NRCG agreed that the selected ICT3 should be given time to develop a team for future team application and implementation efforts.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Open recruitment for the Type 3 Incident Commander position in April 2026. Complete ICT3 selection process in May 2026.
- Continue collecting and evaluating survey data related to IMT recruitment, retention, and sustainability.
- Further assess opportunities for additional Type 3 team development and future CIMT transition potential.
- Expand recruitment and engagement outreach beyond existing IMT personnel to include militia, dispatch, and broader agency participation.

NR Training – Futuring / Program Update | Craig Glazier provided an update on Northern Rockies training program and future planning efforts, including discussion surrounding the Priority Trainee Program and NRTC leadership. Participants discussed uncertainties associated with Phase 4 of Forest Service hiring and ongoing questions regarding future supervisory structure and oversight responsibilities.

The group expressed concerns related to staffing and organizational support within the evolving Wildland Fire Service structure, including the importance of maintaining commitment to critical training and workforce development positions. Members noted support for establishing or filling a dedicated training specialist position to help support long-term training coordination and succession planning efforts.

Discussion also focused on the future of the Priority Trainee Program. The group agreed to defer major changes until after completion of the Geographic Area Training Representative (GATR) hiring process and broader committee review efforts. Members noted the current Priority Trainee Program framework was approved by NRCG in March 2022 and that the Training Committee has been operating under that direction. Future tasking may include a comprehensive review and reevaluation of the existing Priority Trainee Program, training committee function, and associated survey feedback.

Adjournment | NRCG adjourned at 1200 hours to attend the Northern Rockies IMT Meeting.

WEDNEDAY, APRIL 8, 2026

Northern Rockies Zone Validity | The group discussed the continued validity and functionality of the Northern Rockies zone structure, including whether current zone configurations still align with operational and dispatch realities. Participants noted the Eastern Zone has experienced increased activity levels and regularly manages multiple incidents requiring prioritization of initial attack resources, though the zone has not historically operated at a MAC level. Members identified a need for additional training and familiarity with Zone MAC (ZMAC) functions, processes, and decision-making expectations.

Concerns were also raised that the Southwest Zone may no longer be functioning effectively under the current structure. Discussion included evaluating alternative approaches for defining zones, including aligning them with dispatch center boundaries, predictive services boundaries, agreements, and other operational considerations. Specific dispatch areas discussed included Miles City Dispatch, Billings Dispatch, Lewistown Dispatch, and North Dakota coordination needs. Participants noted that establishing high-functioning Zone MAC organizations could improve coordination and prioritization capabilities across the Geographic Area. Continue planning for ZMAC/GMAC exercise training in June 2026. Corey Buhl will provide a follow-up report on ZMAC/GMAC exercise planning during the May meeting. Adriane Beck also highlighted the added complexity associated with restrictions, closures, and county boundary considerations.

The group agreed that additional outreach and evaluation are needed before making any structural changes. NRCG leadership will gather feedback on the potential impacts, benefits, and concerns associated with reorganizing zones around dispatch boundaries and other operational criteria, with additional discussion anticipated later in fall 2026.

ACTION ITEM: Collect feedback on potential zone reorganization concepts, including alignment with dispatch boundaries, predictive services boundaries, and existing agreements. Evaluate pros, cons, operational impacts, and concerns associated with potential zone restructuring. Karly will facilitate collection of stakeholder feedback and information. Cory Calnan will assist with socializing and coordinating outreach on proposed concepts.

Review of Zone / Committee Reports | The group reviewed committee and zone reports provided in pre-reading materials and discussed several ongoing operational, training, and organizational priorities.

- The Business Committee continues work on charter updates and plans to revisit cost share methodology discussions during the May meeting.

- The Operations Committee reported ongoing work related to IHC staffing challenges, national-level hotshot discussions, early season dispatch center and tanker base staffing models, and review of fire suppression module drawdown plans. Members also discussed anticipated Red Book changes, including possible updates to crew staffing requirements and national rotation concepts. Additional discussion focused on evaluating dispatch zone drawdown processes and potential alignment with Geographic Area drawdown planning and staffing models.
- Training Committee discussion focused heavily on the Priority Trainee Program and future trainee prioritization strategies. Members discussed whether the current "everyone is a trainee" approach remains effective and whether future prioritization should focus more specifically on Incident Commander, Command & General Staff, and other hard-to-fill positions. Craig Glazier noted prior feedback from NRCC suggested trainee assignment opportunities have generally been successful, but members agreed the discussion should continue with incoming NRTC leadership.
- East Zone representatives identified a need to revisit and update the zone charter.
- Dispatch Committee discussion included updates related to the NMAC resource integration memo, national visibility of available resources, and increasing workload associated with rostering and communication coordination. Members also discussed the importance of ensuring active representation and engagement from dispatch centers as additional responsibilities and coordination needs continue to increase.

The group also discussed organizational impacts associated with the Wildland Fire Service transition, including potential adjustments to committee membership structures. Members considered models similar to NWCG, where parent committees are streamlined to voting members while relying on subcommittees and subject matter experts for technical support and task group participation. Participants noted this may help reduce redundancy and clarify committee roles moving forward.

NRCG – GMAC Exercise | Meeting participants participated in a two-hour Geographic Multi-Agency Coordinating Group exercise. The exercise included an overview of NR Intel Desk products, MAC plan approval decision, and NRCG MAC representative rotation and expectations.

Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring MAC representatives arrive prepared and informed, with intelligence products focused on supporting decision-making rather than simply presenting information. The group expressed interest in incorporating Public Information Officer (PIO) subject matter expertise into the process and noted a preference for intelligence products to include recommendations and actionable analysis for GMAC consideration. **DECISION:** NRCG members unanimously approved the Northern Rockies MAC Plan. **ACTION ITEM:** Discuss GMAC Delegations of Authority during the May meeting. Finalize Delegations of Authority by June 1, 2026.

Review of 2026 Goals | The group reviewed and discussed progress toward NRCG's 2026 goals, including ongoing work associated with IMT governance, committee coordination, succession planning, and organizational transition efforts. Overall, NRCG feels they have made significant progress on most of their estapliched goals. Of note, the Northern Rockies IMT SOP is expected to be distributed for review in May, with formal approval anticipated during the June 16 NRCG monthly meeting.

Bin Items / Final Discussion

- Members discussed the updated National Weather Service (NWS) agreement to NRCG for review and approval.
- **ACTION ITEM:** Members discussed the importance of providing a formal note of thanks recognizing IMT members and supervisors for their continued service and support.

- Additional discussion focused on training commitments and concerns surrounding course cancellations or low commitment levels. The group agreed that additional coordination with NRTC is needed to better understand agency participation and engagement.

Next Meetings

- State of Montana Governor's Fire Briefing - June 2, 2026.
- NRCG Fall Meeting - November 2–6, 2026. Exact dates/times and location TBD.
- NRCG Spring Meeting is scheduled for the week of April 5, 2027. Exact dates/times and location TBD.

Adjournment | The meeting adjourned at 1200 hours.