

Exhibit C. Operating Plan

Montana Statewide Operating Plan
2023-2027

Between

THE STATE OF MONTANA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION
UEI: FM98VUXB4LM9

And the

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MONTANA/DAKOTAS STATE OFFICE
UEI: YWM3W5LSWY51
Agreement # 2023-BLM-MT911-001

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
INTERMOUNTAIN REGION
UEI: ZK1LYM6WE3C4

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
NORTHWEST REGION
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION
UEI: FAEQN3LV59K3
Agreement #23C00443300

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
MOUNTAIN-PRAIRIE REGION
UEI: MMR7BW92EDK3

And The

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FOREST SERVICE
NORTHERN REGION
UEI: G2EGL5TJE6N3
Agreement # 23-FI-11015600-048

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT MONTANA/DAKOTAS STATE OFFICE**North Central District**

Lewistown Field Office
 Malta Field Office
 Glasgow Field Office
 Havre Field Office
 Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

Western Montana District

Butte Field Office
 Missoula Field Office
 Dillon Field Office

Eastern Montana/Dakotas District

Miles City
 Billings
 North Dakota
 South Dakota Field Offices

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**Intermountain Region**

Big Hole National Battlefield
 Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument
 Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area
 Nez Perce National Historic Park
 Glacier National Park
 Yellowstone National Park
 Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS**Rocky Mountain Region**

Crow Agency
 Ft. Belknap Reservation
 Ft. Peck Reservation
 Northern Cheyenne Reservation
 Rocky Boy Reservation
 Blackfeet Reservation

Northwest Region

Flathead Reservation
 National Bison Range

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**Mountain-Prairie Region**

Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)
 Benton Lake Wildlife Management District (WMD)
 Bowdoin NWR
 Bowdoin WMD
 Bozeman Fish Technology Center
 Charles M. Russell NWR
 Northwest Montana Wetlands Mgmt. District
 Creston National Fish Hatchery
 Ennis National Fish Hatchery

Lee Metcalf NWR
 Lost Trail NWR
 Medicine Lake NWR
 Medicine Lake WMD
 National Bison Range
 Kootenai NWR
 Charles M. Russell WMD
 Red Rock Lakes NWR
 Swan River NWR

FOREST SERVICE**Northern Region**

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
 Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest
 Bitterroot National Forest
 Kootenai National Forest
 Custer Gallatin National Forest
 Lolo National Forest
 Flathead National Forest
 Aerial Fire Depot

STATE OF MONTANA**DNRC**

Central Land Office
 Northwestern Land Office
 Southern Land Office
 Southwestern Land Office
 Eastern Land Office
 Northeastern Land Office

This Operating Plan is hereby made and entered into by and between the Parties pursuant to the Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Management and Stafford Act Response Agreement (23-FI-11015600-048) signed and dated 12/31/2022. This Operating Plan, inclusive of any referenced attachments or Exhibits, is tiered to the Agreement. When a modification to this Operating Plan is necessary, a formal modification to the agreement is unnecessary unless a modification contradicts any terms and conditions of the Master Agreement. If conflict exists between the Operating Plan and the Master Agreement, the Master Agreement controls and not the Operating Plan.

I. PURPOSE

This is a Statewide Operating Plan applicable to all signatory Parties within the State of Montana. Its purpose is to address statewide issues affecting cooperation, interagency working relationships and protocols, financial arrangements, sharing of resources, and joint activities/projects. The [Northern Rockies Interagency Mobilization Guide](#) is considered part of this Operating Plan.

II. RECITALS

Stafford Act responses and related National Response Framework activities will be accomplished utilizing established dispatch coordination concepts. Situation and damage assessment information will be transmitted through established fire suppression intelligence channels.

Jurisdictional Agencies are responsible for all planning documents, i.e. land use, resource and fire management plans and decision support documents, for a unit's wildland fire and fuels management program.

Protecting Agencies implement the actions documented and directed by the appropriate planning documents and decision support documents for initial and extended attack on wildfire incidents. They provide the supervision and support including operational oversight, direction, and logistical support to Incident Management Teams (IMTs).

III. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

The following are incorporated by reference and will remain in effect under the authority of the Master Agreement until revised or renegotiated as appropriate:

- [Northern Rockies Interagency Mobilization Guide](#)
- [Northern Rockies Multi-Agency Coordinating Group Operating Handbook](#)
- [NRCCG Mobilization of Local Government Firefighting Resources](#)

A. Interagency Dispatch Centers:

1. **Purpose and Overview:** The Parties to this Operating Plan agree to maintain, support, and participate in Northern Rockies Coordination Center (NRCC). Current interagency dispatch and coordination centers within the state of Montana are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Tier 3 (Zone) Dispatch Centers in MT

Billings Dispatch (DNRC/BIA/BLM/FS)	Bitterroot Dispatch (DNRC/BLM/FS)
Dillon Dispatch (DNRC/BLM/FS)	Helena Dispatch (DNRC/BLM/FS)
Kalispell Dispatch (DNRC/FS/NPS)	Kootenai Dispatch (DNRC/FS)
Lewistown Dispatch (DNRC/BIA/BLM/FWS/FS)	Northern Rockies Coordination Center (DNRC/BLM/BIA/FWS/FS/NPS)
Missoula Dispatch (DNRC/BLM/FS)	Miles City Dispatch (DNRC/FWS/FS)

All base labor will be covered by the employing agency. These are not reimbursable costs, unless assigned to a specific incident on a resource order. Overtime is a cost directly attributed to a specific incident.

2. **Administrative Oversight/Structure:** Addressed on the [Northern Rockies Interagency Coordination Center](#) website.
3. **Dispatch Organization:** Interagency staffing at NRCC and zone dispatch centers are detailed in the [Northern Rockies Mobilization Guide](#), Chapter 70 Fire Organization Directory.
4. **Roles and Responsibilities:** Addressed on the NRCC website. NRCC and each of the zone dispatch centers are led by a Center Manager and are supported by interagency geographic area or zone Boards of Directors. The NRCC Center Manager has been delegated the authority to move resources throughout the Northern Rockies Geographic Area (NRGA) and between other national geographic areas to accomplish the mission of the NRGA coordination system.
5. **Dispatch Services:**
 - a. **Initial and Extended Attack:** Fire dispatching for fires on land protected by agencies will comply with the following:
 - i. Resources will be dispatched using the closest force(s) concept. Pre- planned response plans based on National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) indices will be utilized to guide this process.
 - ii. The responsibility for management of the incident will fall to the most qualified initial attack supervisor on the first resource to arrive at the scene. Individual will remain as Incident Commander until released of these duties by the protecting or Jurisdictional Agency.
 - iii. Agencies are responsible to provide information and assistance to each other in a timely manner, for proper completion of the fire reports.
 - iv. In the event of an extended attack or when incident management teams are in command of an incident, dispatch actions for that incident will be conducted through the Jurisdictional Agency, unless the Jurisdictional Agency delegates otherwise.
 - b. **Mobilization, Demobilization and Support:** Addressed on the Northern Rockies Interagency Coordination Center website. The NRCC Center Manager has been delegated the authority to support and move resources within the NRGA and between geographic areas in support of preparedness, severity, and wildland needs.

- c. **Aviation:** Forms, safety elements, maps, resource status, contracts, and guides addressing aviation operations are located on the [NRCC Aviation website](#). Montana state aircraft are not approved for use by federal agencies. Under emergency circumstances, where human life is immediately at risk by wildfire on federal lands under federal protection, a federal line officer can approve the use of non-federally approved aircraft to address the immediate threat. This exemption must only take place when sufficient federal aircraft are not readily available to meet the emergency need.
 - d. **Prescribed Fire:** The NRCC Center Manager has been delegated the authority to support and move resources within the NRGAs and between other geographic areas in support of prescribed fire needs.
 - e. **All Hazard:** The NRCC Center Manager has been delegated the authority to support and move resources within the NRGAs and between other geographic areas in support non-wildfire emergencies and all-hazard incidents in a manner consistent with the providing agency's mission and management objectives.
6. **Funding:** Sharing project costs will be documented in separate Supplemental Project Plans. Sharing project costs such as staffing, funding, and level of participation will be agreed to by the affected Parties to this Operating Plan and documented in sub-geographic area, or dispatch operating plans and/or appropriate mobilization guides. Separate Supplemental Fire Project Agreements will be developed and executed documenting these arrangements and the exchange of funds.

B. Interagency Resources:

1. **NRCC Funding and Staffing:** Each Party to this agreement contributes financially and with personnel to run the NRCC.
2. **Mobilization Between Zone Dispatch Centers:** Per Northern Rockies Mobilization Guide Chapter 10 Policy, all dispatch centers may order resources from their neighbor(s). Zone dispatch centers adjacent to one another in the Eastern, Great Basin, Rocky Mountain, and Northern Rockies Geographic Areas may engage in resource ordering across geographic area boundaries. Formal agreement or MOU will be required if there is any exchange of funds or a need for cross-billing authorities.
3. **Interstate Mobilization:** The [Emergency Management Assistant Compact \(EMAC\)](#) is an agreement to provide mutual assistance in wildland fire incident management. The Northwest Compact, available on [DNRC Agreements, Plans, and Guides](#) website, is an agreement between multiple U.S. States and Canadian Provinces to govern interstate mobilization in support of incident management.
4. **Incident Management Teams:** The Northern Rockies Complex and Type 3 Incident Management Teams (IMT) are identified annually on [NRCC Overhead](#) webpage. The [Northern Rockies IMT Standard Operating Guide](#) (SOG) describes implementation of NRCG's mission for providing direction to Northern Rockies IMT using the national template. The SOG addresses the required elements necessary to successfully assemble, manage, dispatch, perform, and release IMT on all-risk assignments. It is reviewed annually by NRCG, Agency Administrators, and Incident Commanders (IC) to document shared understandings and to incorporate national and regional priorities.

5. **Subject Matter Experts for Competed Solicitations:** The State will provide employees to serve as subject matter experts, auditors for training providers, equipment inspectors, instructors and provide vehicles as available. The Forest Service will reimburse the State for salary, travel, and miscellaneous expenses.
6. **Sub-Geographic Operating Plans (SubGeos):** Sub-Geographic Operating Plans are considered supplements to the CFMA. Copies must be sent to the NRCG Facilitator by **May 15th**. These plans, when received, will be posted on the NRCG website.
7. **Tribal Resources:** Indian tribal resources may be available for use under this agreement through existing Bureau of Indian Affairs/tribal cooperative agreements. In such instances, the cooperative agreement will be incorporated into the Sub-Geographic operating plan by reference.
8. **Use of Inmate Resources:** Use of inmate resources for Federal fire suppression operations are ordered and coordinated through the State of Montana. The Department of Corrections Operating Plan describes the agreement.
9. **Use of National Guard Resources:** Ordering and Payment of National Guard resources will occur through the State of Montana. Procedures for use of military resources are listed in the following agreements:
 - [Memorandum of Agreement with Montana National Guard and DNRC](#)
 - Military Use Handbook (NFES 002175) – regular military forces
10. **Use of International Resources:** Procedures for use of international resources are listed in the following agreements:
 - [Northwest Wildland Fire Protection Agreement \(Northwest Compact\)](#) and [Annual Operational Guidelines](#). Ordering and payment of NW Compact resources are through the respective states. Signatory agencies for the Northwest Compact are States of Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, and provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Yukon Territories, and Northwest Territories.

International Agreements in the National Mobilization Guide describe the process for use and ordering of international resources by federal agencies.

- [British Columbia & NW United States Wildfire Response Border Arrangement](#). Arrangement is to provide the framework under which wildfire management activities, identification, initial response, mutual aid and planning allows for cooperative pre suppression and wildfire protection along the United States and Canada's British Columbia portion of the International Border. This arrangement is between the Province of British Columbia Ministry of Forests Land and Natural Resource Operations, USDA Forest Service – Pacific Northwest Regions, Alaska and Northern Regions; National Park Service – Pacific West, Alaska and Intermountain Regions; and Bureau of Land Management – Oregon/Washington and Idaho State Offices.

- 11. Incident/Project order number:** The incident number for all wildfires will be determined by the Jurisdictional Agency at the point of origin. The lead paying agency for wildfires shall be the protecting or Jurisdictional Agency at the point of origin, unless otherwise agreed to.

Outside of Federal and State jurisdiction, and when a Federal or State agency responds to an incident on city/local/county/private lands, the Incident Order number will be determined by the incident agency (BLM, UFWS, USFS, BIA, NPS, State) initiating suppression activities within the Federal and/or State dispatch center.

C. Standards:

1. All Parties to this operating plan accept the standards for each agency through the duration of an incident, in compliance with the Master Agreement and associated operating plans.
2. The National Wildfire Coordinating Group publication, National Incident Management system: Wildland Fire Qualifications System Guide (PMS 310-1), outlines the minimum requirements for training, experience, physical fitness level, and current standards for wildland fire positions, which all participating agencies have agreed to meet for national mobilization.
3. During initial action, all agencies (federal, state, local and Tribal) accept each other's standards. Once jurisdiction is clearly established, then the standards of the agency(s) with jurisdiction prevail.

D. Local Government Fire Forces (LGFF):

1. LGFF refers to a subdivision of local government organized and administered under Montana Code Annotated, Title 7. The following are interchangeable with the term LGFF:
 - Fire departments (career, combination, volunteer) including municipal, rural fire districts, volunteer fire company, fire service area, or county rural fire department
 - County or municipal (e.g., town or city) equipment and personnel
 - Volunteer and paid personnel from local government Fire, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Search and Rescue, or Law Enforcement organizations
2. Wildland fire protection areas frequently overlap with areas of local government or rural fire protection responsibility (generally referred to as "stacked protection"). The Protecting Agency may negotiate with local government fire forces and to develop local agreements that clearly establish responsibilities for protection of wildland and structures within their protection boundaries. Agreements will follow the NRCG Mobilization Guide and NWCG Standards for Interagency Business Management. The State will work with LGFF to map local departments' protection areas.
3. The State maintains cooperative fire control agreements with all 56 counties. This State/County Cooperative Fire Protection arrangement ensures wildland fire protection on over 55 million acres of state and private land not otherwise covered by a recognized protection agency. The county and its firefighting operations organize, respond, and perform both their respective Title 7 (Local Government Fire Protection) obligations and DNRC's Title 76 (Wildland Fire) duties as outlined in MCA § 76-13-104. Montana counties agree to provide the basic level of wildland fire protection through a system of rural firefighting organizations and county personnel. In return for this service, cooperating counties receive DNRC support in the form of organizational and technical assistance/advice, fire equipment, training, and direct fire control assistance when required.
4. The State will incorporate county fire protection chapters into each Sub-Geographic Operating Plan as appropriate. This will define relationships between Federal, State, and

County protection entities. LGFF that are not covered under a state or county cooperative agreement cannot be signatory to a Sub-Geographic Operating Plan as provided for in this agreement. Individual agreements with these entities can be made between any federal agency and a LGFF.

5. LGFF are hired and made available to cooperating agencies and the interagency wildland fire system through the State. Dispatching LGFF should follow all the protocols stated in the [NRCG Mobilization of Local Firefighting Forces](#) and [Chapter 50 of the Northern Rockies Supplement to the NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management](#).
 6. For State and private lands protected by the State via a State/County Cooperative Agreement, a federal agency may provide mutual aid assistance to the local government entity in the interest of preventing a growing or escalating wildfire incident. State pre-approval is not required for federal mutual aid assistance; however, the designated State Duty Officer should be notified as soon as possible. Qualified federal expenses as a Supporting Agency can be billed to the State in accordance with thresholds established in Exhibit D. Reimbursable Billings and Payments.
 7. For LGFF operating in a supporting role on federally managed incidents, eligible reimbursable costs are limited to personnel and equipment that meet qualification requirements as specified in the NRCG Mobilization of LGFF and NWCG 310-1.
 8. The State may reimburse LGFF for costs accrued during a Mutual Aid Period when it is in the best interest of the State.
 9. When operating in support of a Federal Protection agency, LGFF resources are considered an extension of the State as a Supporting Agency. The State shall reimburse LGFF for qualified expenses and in turn bill the Federal Protection Agency in accordance with cost thresholds established in Exhibit D. Reimbursable Billings and Payments.
- E. Fire Wardens:** By virtue of their positions in wildfire response and acting within the scope of this agreement, employees of recognized wildland fire protection entities are approved and recognized by the State as a Fire Warden, as authorized in 76-13-104 (7) and subject to the duties of 76-13-116.
- F. Tribal Resources and Wildland Fire Protection:** Within the state of Montana, Indian Trust Lands held in trust by the Department of Interior is managed by BIA. Tribal fire management organizations may participate in wildland fire management activities under an agreement with BIA.
- G. Supplemental Fire Department Resources:** N/A

IV. PREPAREDNESS

- A. Protection Planning:** The Jurisdictional Agency may utilize its own personnel and equipment to conduct fuels management, planned ignitions, or other related preparedness tasks (e.g., prevention patrols). All activities will be coordinated with the Protecting Agency.
- B. Protection Areas and Boundaries:** An interactive map of [Current Wildfire Protection in Montana](#) is maintained by MT DNRC. The map will be reviewed annually at the Sub-Geographic level. Maps and databases that depict wildland protection unit boundaries, lands that have been exchanged for protection purposes and areas that have local government fire protection responsibilities are compiled and maintained by the State. Protection agreements will be reviewed annually at the Sub-Geographic level; changes to protection will be approved at the

Regional (federal) and Bureau (state) level. Reciprocal initial attack zone and Special Management Areas will be documented in Sub-Geographic Area Operating Plans. Initial attack, mutual aid, or assistance for hire among federal, state, and local government entities should be described in the Sub-Geographic Operating Plans or in local agreements between federal agencies and local entities.

C. Methods of Fire Protection and Suppression

1. Reciprocal (Mutual Aid) Fire Assistance

The Parties to this agreement consider their lands in the State of Montana affected by this agreement to be reciprocal. Mutual aid will be demonstrated by the Minimum Billing Threshold (MBT) identified in Exhibit D. As needed, or upon request, a Supporting Agency may assist a Protecting Agency through mutual aid assistance. The Protecting Agency will assign a Fire Code to the Incident. Supporting Agencies are responsible for initiating their own agency-specific business practices and assigning financial codes that allow for cost tracking and isolation for all support provided to ensure the MBT works as planned. Supporting Agency costs incurred will be billed in accordance with thresholds established in Exhibit D.

2. Exchange (Offset) Protection

The BLM, FWS, NPS, BIA, Forest Service and the State have negotiated an exchange of protection, which redistributes fire protection responsibilities throughout the state. The exchange is based on acreage and agreed to by all Parties. The process used provides an acceptable balance of exchange and mutual benefit. Official maps and narratives documenting the exchange are available online at the [Montana Offset Protection Map](#).

Separate Interagency Agreements between the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management describe the terms of a federal-to-federal offset protection exchange. Where this Interagency Agreement applies, the State is a Supporting Agency. Areas where federal to federal offset exist will be described in Sub-Geographic Operating Plans and the appropriate Interagency Agreement will be referenced.

All fire suppression costs on such lands where offset protection is employed will be borne by the Protecting Agency. Suppression resources requested by the Protecting Agency and provided by the Jurisdictional Agency or Supporting Agencies on these lands is reimbursable.

- a. The master statewide offset map will be adjusted, as needed, each year in conjunction with the updates to Exhibit C. The Montana Statewide Operating Plan. Realignment of offset protection boundaries statewide will originate at the sub-geographic area (NRCG Zone) level when interagency fire management staff redistribute offset acres to maximize efficiency and align protection responsibilities with their agencies' missions. All realignment will be approved at the Regional and Bureau level, documented in the Montana Offset Protection Map, described in Sub-Geographic Area Operating Plans, and distributed to affected Dispatch Centers.
- b. Sub-Geographic Areas will align with NRCG Zone boundaries, and each will have at least one Sub-Geographic Area Operating Plan. Each Dispatch Center will have an Operating Plan that includes a Financial Plan for illustration of shared costs. Sub-Geographic Area Operating Plans will be finalized by **March 1** each year to allow adequate time for distribution to Dispatch Centers and interagency fire management staff in preparation for the upcoming fire season.

D. Joint Projects and Project Plans

Sub-Geographic Operating Plans will list or reference joint cooperative projects, if applicable. (These types of projects/plans will be outlined in separate documents).

These projects may involve such activities as prescribed fire/fuels management, preparedness, fire analysis/planning, rehabilitation, training, prevention, public affairs, and other beneficial efforts in support of interagency fire management. Implementation of such projects will require a separate agreement, or other appropriate written document, executed by the authorized signatories of the involved Parties. This may include a Supplemental Fire Project Agreement, as in Exhibit I or other written document.

E. Fire Prevention and Education

The Agencies will share and jointly work together to deliver fire prevention and education programs. Activities may include joint press releases, Smokey Bear programs, campaigns such as One Less Spark, One Less Wildfire, and local education programs. All parties to this agreement may assist the Protecting Agency responsible for wildland fire suppression to perform wildfire risk assessments on public or private lands. The Agencies shall share the cost of prevention and education activities as agreed to and documented in Sub-Geographic Operating Plans but may not seek reimbursement from the cooperating agency without an executed Supplemental Fire Project Agreement or other written agreement.

F. Public Use Restrictions

Public use restrictions/fire prevention orders will be coordinated between all agencies, so that a unified message can be delivered to the public. It is the responsibility of each agency to issue public use restrictions/fire prevention orders. Montana Restrictions Orders and Maps will be available at the [Montana Wildland Fire Information](#) webpage. Fire restrictions in the state will be conducted as per the [NRCG Restrictions and Closures Guide](#). The [NRCG Restrictions and Closures Toolbox](#) contains Area Plans, Publications, and Products associated with Stage I and II Restrictions, local burn bans and closures. Individual tribal governments may have a localized restriction order or resolution process. NRCG Area Restrictions Coordinators will post Fire Restrictions and Interagency Orders at www.MTFireInfo.org

G. Burning Permits: All burning permits will be issued per each agency's guidelines.

1. Burn permits are needed on private lands classified as forested by the State.
2. Many counties have adopted a [County Burn Permit and Notification Service](#). This allows citizens to apply for a burn permit online. The service allows for communication to the public regarding smoke management, fire danger, burn bans, and best practices when burning debris or agricultural lands. The service can be set up to collect funds from permittees, or the county may choose to pay for the service and set up free access. When a county participates in the online system, wildland fire management agencies and dispatch centers can access an auto-generated map of active burn permits in their county on any given day.
3. If a Protecting Agency wishes to issue burn permits for lands outside its jurisdiction, it must coordinate with the Jurisdictional Agency for delegated authority. Enforcement of burn permit violations, arson, or trespass is the responsibility of the Jurisdictional Agency, unless the fire is adjacent to, or threatens, another agency's jurisdiction.

H. Prescribed Fire (Planned Ignitions) and Fuels Management:

Planned projects will be coordinated. Agencies will follow agency requirements and exchange of funds will be documented in a separate Supplemental Fire Project Agreement.

When a planned ignition is declared a wildfire, the management of the wildfire shall be agreed upon by the protecting and jurisdictional agencies and documented in Sub-Geographic Operating

Prescribed fire and fuels management activities will be addressed in Sub-Geographic Operating Plans or other agreements, or if requested on a detailed resource order. For federal agencies, billing will follow the guidance set in the [Interagency Agreement for Fire Management](#) as signed by the federal agency administrators.

I. Smoke Management:

- 1. Air Resource Advisors:** Ensure smoke impacts to the public and fire personnel are addressed through the IMT ordering Air Resource Advisors (ARA) on Type 1 fires and consider ordering ARA to Type 2 fires per the Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Red Book) and Public Law 116-9, the Dingell Act, 2019. ARA are members of the Wildland Fire Air Quality Response Program and are specialists in smoke management and air quality. An ARA is recommended when an incident has smoke management objectives and/or smoke is expected to impact communities or sensitive populations for an extended period. ARA are ordered in Interagency Resource Ordering Capability (IROC) as Technical Specialists (THSP). Additional information on ordering an ARA can be found in the Northern Rockies Mobilization Guide.
- 2. Montana/Idaho Airshed Group:** Agencies in Montana and Idaho are members of the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group and coordinate smoke management from prescribed fire actions following specific protocols. The group's procedures are outlined in the [Montana/Idaho Airshed Group Operating Guide](#) website.

V. OPERATIONS

A. Fire Notifications:

Detection will be coordinated between agencies as needed. All fire detected will be reported to the appropriate dispatch center. If applicable, Sub-Geographic Operating Plans shall specify notification procedures and timelines, to include timeframes when final fire reports will be sent to jurisdictional agencies.

B. Boundary Line Fires:

Units are expected to review boundary areas annually with neighboring agencies to determine whether preplanned response strategies, (e.g., run cards, special management considerations), are still appropriate for each other's jurisdictional interests. Plans to resolve adjacency issues will be documented in Sub-Geographic Operating Plans and on maps referenced in those plans. Those plans will guide the development of cost share agreements if multi-jurisdictional fires occur in the area.

When a wildland fire that is being managed for resource objectives, spreads into a neighboring jurisdiction where fire is not wanted, the managing jurisdiction shall be responsible for wildfire suppression costs.

C. Independent Action on Lands Protected by Another Agency:

- 1.** Any participating agency may, upon its own initiative, at the risk of their own expense, and with appropriate notification and coordination, respond to wildland fires on lands that are under the direct protection of another agency. All fire suppression actions conducted on lands of other Agencies shall be consistent with the Jurisdictional Agency's land management policy.
- 2.** Parties to this Agreement shall not perform any fire suppression action that is contrary to limitations found in associated Sub-Geographic Operating Plans.

D. Response to Wildland Fire:

1. Agency administrators should include nearby jurisdictions and landowners that could be affected, through planning, strategy development, seeking additional information to understand the adjacent landowners' concerns.
2. Wildfires on federal lands that are not human caused may be managed for multiple objectives as established in land and resource management plans. These areas and the process for fire management in these areas will be documented in Sub-Geographic Operating plans. Adjacent fire protection entities, including state and local government, should be consulted regarding fire management strategies utilized in these areas, and share decision-making whenever possible. For fires under protection responsibility of the state, under Montana Statute, the State's objective in response to wildland fire is fire suppression.
3. All fire agencies have primary responsibility for fire suppression with their respective protection areas. All agencies, as appropriate, should be involved in developing the strategy, tactics, and mitigation actions to be used if the fire has potential to impact another protection area. When the fire spread to another protection area is imminent or appears likely, the agencies will identify financial responsibilities and, as appropriate, cost share methodologies, and document the decisions and rationale. If agreement cannot be reached regarding financial responsibilities, discussion will be elevated to the next level agency administrators for the respective agencies.
4. Protecting agencies will share staffing level response to meet Jurisdictional Agency objectives. These expectations/staffing levels will be discussed between both Parties and the expected response will be agreed to annually. Protecting agencies will be expected to be fully staffed from June 1 until September 15 each year. Protecting agencies will be expected to respond to wildfires outside of these dates as conditions warrant but may not be fully staffed depending upon funding. If a Protecting Agency is not able to provide the resources required for additional staffing outside of these dates or to meet additional resource protection requirements for the area due to special management requirements (i.e., additional resource protection requirements protecting sage grouse habitat, special events on Jurisdictional Agency land, etc.), the Jurisdictional Agency may provide additional preparedness costs or additional resources to the protection agency. Additional preparedness costs and resources should be discussed between all agencies involved in the offset, to facilitate a balance, if necessary, across the state.

E. Decision Process:

The development of suppression strategies and tactics should consider the probability of success, safety risk mitigations, available resources, values at risk, social and political values, and existing legal statutes. The decisions should be documented per each agencies policy and included in the incident file. A wildland fire decision document will be completed by the Jurisdictional Agency per agency requirements. The wildland fire decision documents the Jurisdictional Agency's direction for the specific incident. Periodic assessments by the agency administrator of the wildland fire decision will occur.

The Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) is used by the federal agencies and the State uses the Incident Situation Assessment (ISA).

The Jurisdictional Agency provides resource-based input to the incoming team through the Jurisdictional Agency's line officer signature delegation, development of the wildland fire decision document, and presence of a Jurisdictional Agency resource advisor on the incident. The Delegation of Authority (DOA) will incorporate these planning documents and will clearly communicate the intent of the leader(s). The DOA will be signed by all Agencies based on incident requirement.

F. Cooperation:

All Parties will be involved in developing strategy and tactics which would be used if a wildland fire does cross jurisdictional or protection boundaries. Neighboring Jurisdictional or Protecting Agencies should provide prompt notification to neighboring agencies when concerns exist about fires that have the potential to impact adjacent jurisdictions or protection areas.

G. Communication:

1. Communications should occur prior to fire seasons and during the early stages of wildland fires. Agencies managing fires, especially those with multiple objectives, should consider firefighter and public safety, predicted weather conditions, resource drawdown, proximity to private property, values at risk, smoke, current and anticipated fire activity, and time of season.
2. News releases are issued through the jurisdictional public affairs offices of each agency. Where applicable, news releases should be coordinated between the agencies.
3. The Incident Status Summary (ICS-209), submitted to the GACC, is used to report large wildland fires and any other significant events on lands under federal protection or federal ownership. Large fires are classified as 100 acres or larger in timber fuel types, 300 acres or larger in grass fuel types, or when a NIMO, Type 1 or 2 Incident Management Team is assigned, regardless of the size of the incident or the suppression management strategy.
4. Frequency sharing between agencies is allowed per FCC (Federal Communications Commission) and NTIA (National Telecommunications and Information Administration) rules. Frequency use is authorized via written MOU to ensure compliance with the respective agencies' official license/authorization parameters.
5. Each year, all signatories to this Agreement coordinate to publish and distribute the NRCCG Frequency Guide, detailing the frequencies that are issued to each agency within the Northern Rockies. The guide is not published online. It is available for reference by contacting the NRCC's Aviation Desk.

H. Cost Efficiency:

Jurisdictions may identify, in Sub-Geographic Operating Plans, conditions under which cost efficiency may dictate where suppression strategies and tactical actions are taken (i.e., it may be more cost effective to put the containment line along an open grassland than along a mid-slope in timber). Points to consider include loss and benefit to land, values at risk, resource, social and political values, and existing legal statutes.

I. Delegation of Authority (DOA):

1. The Protecting Agency has delegated authority for fire suppression responsibility as per this agreement, and, as such, is responsible for drafting a DOA for an Incident Management Team (IMT). The Protecting and Jurisdictional Agencies are encouraged to jointly develop and sign DOAs for Type 4 and 5 incidents.

2. In the case of an incoming IMT (Type 1, 2, 3), or Complex Incident Management Teams, the Protecting and Jurisdictional Agencies are encouraged to jointly develop and sign the DOA. Processes for developing the DOA will be documented in Sub-Geographic Area Operating Plans.
3. The Jurisdictional Agency maintains all other jurisdictional authority.

J. Preservation of Evidence:

1. As initial action is taken on a fire, initial attack resources will preserve information and evidence pertaining to the origin and cause of the fire regardless of jurisdiction. All costs related to those activities will be the responsibility of the Protecting Agency.
2. The Protecting Agency will notify the Jurisdictional Agency as soon as possible if the fire may potentially be a trespass fire. Protecting and Jurisdictional Agencies shall render mutual assistance in the gathering of evidence. If the cause is determined to be human or unknown, the Incident Commander will request a wildland fire investigator (INVF) through dispatch.

K. Origin and Cause Investigations:

1. Generally, jurisdictional agencies will be responsible for conducting origin and cause investigations within their own respective jurisdictions.
2. Fires that originate within a jurisdictional boundary and burn onto or affect an adjacent jurisdiction will require agency personnel to coordinate and decide if a joint investigation is appropriate.
3. DNRC acknowledges the limitations and authorities on sworn and non-sworn law enforcement federal personnel in conducting origin and cause determinations on state- or privately-owned lands not directly adjacent to, threatening or affecting federal lands (36 CFR 261.1 and 43 USC 1733).
4. Federal sworn and non-sworn personnel may conduct origin and cause determinations on state- or privately-owned lands by official request from the DNRC or appropriate state agency with jurisdiction where a significant interest to justice or the public is concerned.
 - a. Sworn federal personnel will have signed agreements in place imparting full deputization status with the sheriff's department of the county of the incident's origin.
 - b. Sworn federal personnel will have signed agreements in place imparting full deputization status with the sheriff's department of the county of the incident's origin.
5. Federal agencies and DNRC agree to approach wild land fire training, qualifications, task books associated with wild land origin and cause determinations cooperatively.

L. Structure Fire Protection:

The Parties will follow the [NRCG Community and Structure Protection Guidelines](#), which should be used in setting expectations for community and structure fire protection as well as providing leaders intent in any DOA. Anytime structure protection activities occur, the decisions, actions taken, and financial responsibilities should be documented.

M. Invasive Species Mitigation:

The Parties agree to take reasonable steps to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plant, terrestrial, and aquatic species during fire operations and to follow, to the extent practicable, the NRCG Guidance, [AIS Decontamination/Prevention Methods for Air to Ground](#)

[Wildland Fire Water Delivery Resources](#) and, a “how-to” guide for Northern Rockies Incident Management Teams, [Decontaminating Firefighting Equipment to Reduce the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species](#). The Jurisdictional Agency may also provide a resource advisor.

VI. USE AND REIMBURSEMENT OF INTERAGENCY FIRE RESOURCES

A. Cost Share Agreement (Cost Share Methodologies):

Examples of cost sharing methodologies may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. When a wildland fire that is being managed for resource objectives spreads to a neighboring jurisdiction where fire is not wanted, the managing (or protecting, as the case may be) jurisdiction may be responsible for wildfire suppression costs.
2. In those situations where weather, fuels, or fire behavior of the wildland fire precludes stopping at jurisdiction boundaries, cost share methodologies may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Each jurisdiction pays for its own resources – fire suppression efforts are primarily on jurisdictional responsibility lands.
 - b. Each jurisdiction pays for its own resources – services rendered approximate the percentages of jurisdictional responsibility, but not necessarily performed on those lands.
 - c. Cost share by percentage ownership.
 - d. Cost is apportioned by geographic division or percent of effort. Examples of geographic divisions are: Division A and B (using a map as an attachment); or specific locations such as a campground.

B. Training:

The Parties to this Agreement will cooperate to ensure that training is provided that will produce safe and effective fire management and aviation programs. The intent is to champion high-quality training, to minimize training costs by sharing resources, and to standardize content. Local fire departments will be included in this cooperative approach whenever practical. As applicable, all training will meet NWCG 310-1 standards.

1. [NRCG Training Ops Guide](#) is available online and describes the mission of the NRCG. Interagency Fire Training program is to provide and ensure quality training in Wildland Fire Suppression, Incident Management, Aviation Management, Fuels Management, and Leadership Management that is responsive to the needs and direction of the NRCG’s member agencies.
2. Interagency cadre and subject matter experts are encouraged when delivering interagency content.
3. The Northern Rockies are divided into training zones. Each zone has an interagency Zone Training Coordinator (ZTC) who sits on the NRCG Training Committee. The committee meets semi-annually in the spring and fall, and as needed at other times of the year, and is responsible for oversight of course selection, presentation, student selection, and training at the Northern Rockies Training Center (NRTC). Zones are allocated seats for each training session.

4. Nominations to NRTC courses are prioritized and submitted through the ZTC or the Geographic Area Training Representative (GATR) hosting a nominee from NF by utilizing the established nomination process for each session. All ZTC and the GATR will finalize a prioritized list of nominees to NRTC, NAFRI, and Out of Geographic Area training at the 300-level and above.
5. NRCG member agencies do not pay tuition for most courses at NRTC; the exception to this is typically found when course cadre are paid contractors.

C. Communication Systems:

Federal agencies and DNRC share space in collocated communication sites across the state where it is advantageous to do so.

D. Fire Weather Systems:

The [NR Fire Weather Operating Plan](#) is a joint effort between land management agencies of the NRGAs, the [Northern Rockies Predictive Services Unit](#) (PSU) and the National Weather Service (NWS) offices in Billings, Bismarck, Glasgow, Grand Forks, Great Falls, Missoula, Riverton, and Spokane. The purpose of the plan is to coordinate the NWS and PSU products and services provided to the land management community.

1. National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) forecasts are provided on a daily basis from late spring until the end of wildfire season.
2. Spot forecasts will be issued for wildfires, prescribed burns, or other incidents when requested. Please furnish the data indicated on the online [Spot Weather Forecast Form](#) to your local NWS office.
3. Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings will be issued as conditions warrant, in conjunction with critically dry fuels.
4. Remote Automated Weather Stations (RAWS) provide current weather data across Montana and are located [online](#). When operating Remote Automated Weather Stations, Montana DNRC will meet national standards for data requirements and station maintenance requirements.
5. The [Fire Danger Pocket Card](#) provides a format for interpreting and communicating key index values provided by the NFDRS. The Pocket Card provides a description of seasonal changes in fire danger in a local area. It is useful to both local and out-of-area firefighters.

E. Incident Meteorological (IMET) Services: Onsite weather support to large wildfires, prescribed fires, and other major incidents is available. IMETs can be ordered through dispatch for wildfire incidents. In all cases, the ordering process for IMET and supporting equipment is detailed in Chapter 20 of the [National Interagency Mobilization Guide](#). Conditions of these dispatches are in the [National Interagency Agreement for Meteorological and Other Technical Services](#) publication. When ordering an IMET for a prescribed burn, specify:

- That the request is for a prescribed fire project; and
- Expected number of days the IMET will be deployed

- F. Aviation Operations:** Forms, safety elements, maps, resource status, contracts, and guides addressing aviation operations are located on the [NRCC Aviation website](#). Montana State aircraft on cooperative agreements and approved by a federal agency cooperator letter are authorized for use on federally protected lands. Montana State aircraft not approved by a federal agency cooperator letter (non-approved cooperator aircraft) may be utilized on federal protection under emergency situations where human life is immediately at risk by wildfire. Under these circumstances and in accordance with the [Interagency Standards of Fire and Aviation Operations](#), a federal line officer can approve the use of non-approved cooperator aircraft to address the immediate threat. This exemption must only take place when sufficient federal firefighting aircraft are not readily available to meet the emergency need.
- G. Accident Investigations:** See Exhibit J for Wildland Fire Incident and Accident Types and Definitions. Exhibit J is intended to inform Protecting Agencies of the types of investigations required by Jurisdictional Agencies related to wildland fire events.
- H. MAC Group Coordination:** The [NR GMAC Operating Handbook](#) provides an interagency forum to prioritize incidents and efficiently allocate, reallocate, or reassign critical resources during periods of resource shortages. The GMAC Group is activated at Northern Rockies Preparedness Level (PL) 4 or above or when wildland fire activities are affecting multiple Zones and there is competition for critical incident resources. There may also be the need to activate GMAC when the National PL is at 5.
- J. Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS):** The use of drones and UAS aircraft shall follow applicable state and federal regulations, rules, and/or laws including the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). State and federal agencies using these types of aircraft will coordinate operations in advance and notify respective dispatch centers for potential conflicts with other agency missions. To order UAS, go to <https://uas.nifc.gov/uas-ordering>
- K. Incident Traffic Control and Signing:** Incident traffic control and signing is the responsibility of the Protecting Agency and will follow policy and guidance of the Jurisdictional Agency. The State maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) for traffic control. Requests for MDOT resources will be ordered through the local dispatch center and documented on a resource order.
- L. Severity:** Upon agreement by both jurisdictional and protecting agencies, severity resources from the Jurisdictional Agency can augment the Protecting Agency resources.

VII. BILLING PROCEDURES

(Refer to Exhibit D. Reimbursable Billings and Payments)

VIII. GENERAL PROVISIONS

A. Principal Contacts:

Refer to Exhibit B of Master Coop Agreement – Principal Contacts.

- B. Personnel Policy:** Employees of the Parties to this Agreement shall be subject to the personnel rules, laws, and regulations of their respective agencies unless explicitly provided otherwise, employees of the Parties to this Agreement are considered for all purposes employees of their home agency. Supplemental Fire Department Resources are not applicable in Montana.

C. Modification:

Modifications within the scope of this Operating Plan shall be made by mutual consent of the Parties, through the issuance of a written modification signed and dated by all Parties prior to

any changes being performed. Any Party shall have the right to terminate their participation under this Operating Plan by providing one-year advance written notice to the other Parties. The SOP will be reviewed annually for currency and will remain in effect until it is terminated by the mutual consent of all agencies involved or superseded by an updated SOP. The formal review period for modification(s) will be provided by March 1. Agency policy or direction change for any signatory party that affects this agreement would automatically be modified therein.

Modifications that are minor in nature, including changes to principal contact information, billing information, etc., will be reviewed annually and concurred to by all Parties; however, new signatures will not be required.

In the interest of efficiency, modifications to the agreement will be distributed electronically for signature. Signatory officials should respond with an electronic signature and date. Once all signatures have been obtained, and electronic version of the modification will be emailed to the principal contacts as listed in Exhibit B the CFMA.

D. Annual Review:

This Operating Plan is reviewed annually by **March 1st** and revised, as needed.

E. Duration of Operating Plan:

This Operating Plan is executed as of the date of last signature and remains in effect through December 31, 2027 unless modified or superseded.

F. Previous Instruments Superseded:

Exhibit C of the 2017-2023 Montana Master Cooperative Wildland Fire Protection and Stafford Act Response Agreement

*USFS #17-FI-11015600-010, (BLM# L17FMA00001) (NPS# F1249170001)
(BIA# 17P00FM0001 / 17C00440901)*

G. Authorized Representatives:

By signature below, all signatories to this Operating Plan certify that the individuals listed in this document are authorized to act in their respective areas for matters related to this Operating Plan.

X. REVIEW AND SIGNATURES

The Geographic Area Operating Plan will be approved by the signatory state and federal agency member agencies.

The Statewide Operating Plans will be approved by the signatory state and federal agency members. This is the Fire Management Director level for the agency.

Unit Administrators will have the responsibility for developing and approving sub-geographic area operating plans.

Each signatory agency may have policies/procedures for entering into agreements (including this Operating Plan) that require additional review by attorneys, agreement specialists, or contracting officers.

Digitally signed by
Matthew Hall
Date: 2025.10.01
07:50:11 -06'00'

Matthew Hall

1 Oct 2025

MATT HALL, Fire Protection Bureau Chief,
State of Montana, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Date:

Digitally signed by CRAIG
GLAZIER
Date: 2025.10.02
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CRAIG
GLAZIER

CRAIG GLAZIER, Fire & Aviation Management Director,
USDA Forest Service, Northern Region

Date:

Digitally signed by BRAD
DONAHUE
Date: 2025.10.01
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BRAD
DONAHUE

10/1/2025

BRAD DONAHUE, Regional AFMO Operations
USDOI Bureau of Indian Affairs, Northwest Region

Date:

Digitally signed by
AARON THOMPSON
Date: 2025.09.24
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AARON
THOMPSON

AARON THOMPSON, State Fire Management Officer,
USDOI Bureau of Land Management, Montana/Dakotas State Office

Date:

Digitally signed by TATE
FISCHER
Date: 2025.10.01
10:51:43 -05'00'

TATE
FISCHER

TATE FISCHER, Regional Fire Planner,
USDOI Fish & Wildlife Service, Mountain-Prairie Region (6)

Date:

JEREMY LUSHER, Chief of Fire and Aviation,
USDOI National Park Service, Intermountain Region

Date: