

Northern Rockies Operations Committee

10/10/2018 – 10/11/2018

Held at: Helena-LC National Forest/Helena Ranger District

Attendees:

Jay Lindgren
Corey Buhl
Ashley Sites
Dave Soliem
Coleen Haskell
Tim Murphy
Judy Heintz

Kathy Pipkin
Craig Goodell
John Thompson
Marty Mitzkus
Matt Mahe
Andy Schell
Robert Miramontez

Mike Granger
Doug Turman
John Monzie
Lily Huskey
Bob Flesch
Fred Thompson
Phone: Dave Williams

Wednesday, October 10th 1300-1700

Predictive Services Oversight Group

Coleen Haskell – NRCC Meteorologist

- Presented PowerPoint on Predictive Services Update
- September 2016 taskgroup appointed by Fire Management Board (FMB) at NIFC to do a program review. Phase 2 was set into place - FMB memos on Operating Principles/Mission Statement, FAQ and Predictive Services Oversight Group (PSOG) Charter.
- FMB had put into place some guidelines on management and between July-Oct a grievance was filed due to lack of communication on the management.
- Next steps: Cohesion of all functions – Intel, Fire Mgt Analysis, Meteorology
- PSOG: evaluate Mgt alternatives and make recommendations
- Some areas of concern: State involvement? FMB is entirely federal; Charter signed already – is there room for recommendations on GACC input?; membership of the PSOG – diverse among GACCs, agencies, etc.? with field representation; will grievance be addressed?; existing working groups still in place?
- Lack of transparency between PSOG and FMB has caused some friction and surprises in process and oversight.
- FMB Website has FAQs and Coleen encourages folks to provide input on the process and where they are. Contact Coleen @ coleen_haskell@firenet.gov or chaskell@blm.gov
- Ops committee asked to do a position paper to NRCG BOD. Many questions still exist and not sure what the position would be. Unaware of all the issues – some positives, some not. What exactly do these changes mean for the GACC? Without knowing what the recommendations are, hard to provide feedback.
- **ACTION: NR task group to look at issue and develop a response from NR. Meet 10/29/2018. Coleen Haskell, Kathy Pipkin, Julie Polutnik, Michael Richmond, Craig Goodell, Ashley Sites, plus a Center Manager. Kathy or Craig lead. Kathy sent invite to group**

Updates, Issues, Concerns

Northern Rockies Training Center (Craig Goodell for NRTC)

- Melissa not able to be here today so Craig is giving update, handout given
- Priority Trainee program – presented stats
- Mobilized 108 trainees, not including OH thru normal for an additional 10. Breakdown for different functional areas
 - Air – 2
 - Command – 13
 - Finance – 18
 - Logs – 13
 - Operations – 25
 - Plans – 37
- Keys to the program is it is not selective. Everyone who applies, gets in. You just have to sign up to be a priority trainee. Make sure that info is getting out to the field, gets you on the list nationally and assists in the mobilization of the resources more effectively.
- Provides better trainee opportunities given since it is out of GACC, diverse, etc.
- The 108 includes trainees who were on IMTs.
- NRCC had difficulty filling “open” orders not with IMTs due to the commitment of the trainees already assigned.
- Greatest challenge: PTs showing available in ROSS that are not available. Typically, 20% of PTs called declined due to an inaccurate ROSS status.

Northern Rockies Coordination Center – Judy Heintz/Kathy Pipkin

- Echo concern in Predictive Services
- Pam going into the Admin Assistant in FAA leaving only open vacancy in INTEL. All other positions filled. DNRC filled direct protection coordinator with Roy Robinson, Ross Raybe filled behind Roy (Crew desk).
- Dispatching of the MSO airtankers – helping the local dispatch with that workload. Short term fix however, needs to be resolved still.
- Still working on the statistics for the year. 10 year average (due to 2017), average is over 1400 requests processed through NRCC with 72.8% FS.
- Judy retiring January 3rd! Will have IMT meetings set up for 2019/2020, teaching David on how to do selections.
- Judy’s position (NRCC Assistant CM) sent to Position Mgt Board in the BLM to fill the position.
- Have not completed the NRCC AAR.
- Q from Corey: Noticed lack of HEQB, TFLD, should we be providing additional training?

Northern Rockies Fire Cache(s)

- Craig provided update for Anthony.
- Big changes in NRK, will no longer be the national LEAD for the medical kits. Thru decision from Fire Director and RF, decided to disperse the kits to the caches in the

country. Will occur this winter, each cache will maintain the kits. The workload of all those kits, mobilization, refurb, etc... was inefficient. Will free up a lot of warehouse space and time.

- Will add sprinkler kits. Anthony looking at the items needed more in the NR and stock appropriately for NR using the newly found space.
- Hoping to have Refurb done by end of November. Key piece was usage of JCC to do refurb. Great deal for both NRK and JCC.
- Billings Cache: Will have a couple of the medical kits. New building for the Billings cache is in halt as the bids were way too high. Will renegotiate. Also help substantially with refurb. Hopes for the office space to house the Veteran Crew.

Northern Rockies Operations Officer – Craig Goodell

- Slower season, acres wise, but busy in IMT assignments. Each team got 3 rolls (WFM 2 times), out of GACC as well. Still had limited resource availability due to other GACC activity.
- Winter work: ICAP open Nov 13th for IMT applications. Leave open (proposed) through January. Will ask IC cmt for timeframe approval.
 - For folks wanting to move positions, change IMT, all of Connell's IMT must reapply, if any current ICs decide to move on, that entire team would need to reapply. New to rotation last year were Goicoechea and Sampson
- Eastern Area decided to staff an additional Type 2 IMT and thus will not be allowing any EA personnel to fill NR positions on IMTs until EA IMTs are full. Granger added: Will not be limiting Type 1 positions (Judy read letter differently).

Safety – Dave Williams

- Quiet year with handful of Rapid Learning on the site.
- Different this year with support of MAC, tried visits with AA on strategic risks and how it is communicated. Targeting a different level for risk management.
- Report given to BOD.

Zone Updates

North Idaho

- No report

NW Montana – Dave Soliem

- No meeting yet. Oct 25th to review season.
- Busy year. Turman was only NR IMT not hosted in NW MT. 2 international incidents with Canada. Kootenai, Flathead, GNP busy.
- Zone MAC had started calls mid-August
- Next meeting looking at rotation of NWMT zone chair. Rick Connel likely next chair (spring).

Southwest MT – John Thompson

- Not met either, no date set.
- Quiet year. Daily MAC calls August – September. Set priorities as a zone daily but activity wasn't there.

Central MT – Marty Mitzkus

- No meeting set yet.
- B-D had most activity. HLF slow, DNRC slow
- Some MAC calls.
- Zone vacancies: HIRC only has 1 perm filled (DNRC and FS positions open).
- Short Haul ship had first operation this year – Copper Mtn (ID). 5 total nationally.

South Central MT – Ashley Sites

- Bozeman vacancies – Shanafelt filled FMO Bozeman, AFMOs vacancy behind Brickell and Hanson to be filled at fire hire.
- Bacon Rind fire – 60+ days 5200 acres. Interagency with NPS/Gallatin. Type 3 or less = success.

Eastern MT – Don Pyrah

- Scott McAvoy taking Eastern MT zone Ops liaison
- Not met yet as zone.
- Realignment of BLM Eastern MT/Dakotas fire program. Billings field office and Miles City field office FMO realigned.
- Open positions in Miles City, Lewistown
- FWS – 2 ENGB vacancies, really slow year. 4 fires, largest 2500 acres in wilderness/sage grouse, lots of people out

North Dakota

No report

AGENCY REPORTS

BIA

- Regional AFMO vacant. Looking at changing PD – OPM meeting soon to review.
- Dispatch position at BDC still vacant. Fort Peck FMO vacant

FWS

- Hiring difficulties in reorganization in supervisory PDs. All Sup duties go to Mike Granger now. No more supervisor at 7 level
 - No non-supervisory 6/7 PDs so needing reclassification
 - No multi-grade PDs anymore
 - 301/401 issues
- BLM having same issues. Ex: IHC sups won't be supervisory anymore.

DNRC

- Having multiple retirements happening rapidly
- Legislative session Jan 1. Have proposals in. Anticipate no major cuts.

NPS

- Vacancies but no major new ones
- Opened some eyes on large fire mgt the last few years

USFS

- NR FS Operations Specialist position – has been selected but not announced. Will start Nov 12th.

BLM

- Ken Schmidt moving onto Boise. Short term will be Corey Buhl detailer.
- Eastern MT district (Miles City, SD, ND) now also has Billings under it. Will become a district program with 13 FMO. Not sure the fill yet – likely Eric Lepisto with Zone FMO Billings, Zone FMO Miles City
 - Still working out org chart
- North Central Zone Helitack will have their own contract not shared with AZ. Longer contract in NR now.
- Western District – new DM (Hotaling leaving soon)

Other NR Committee reports

Business

- Meeting Oct 23-24 in Billings, topics from the Biz cmt in Ops cmt agenda already (REM, Contracting)

IC

- Meeting Nov 30/31
- Topics already listed in Ops

Equipment/Logistics

- Equipment cmt met – no report

Prevention

- No report
- Have met already but no report

NAC

- Bryce has NAC plan ready for signature
- Unknown stats at this time

Training

- Encourage zone folks to include HEQB classes in their zone
- Will also be an S-420 in January. Ops cmt prioritizes nominees. Closes Nov 1. Ops cmt will have to do a call to prioritize

ACTION ITEM: Prioritize nominees for S-420 after NOV 1. COREY BUHL will coordinate a call

Aviation

- At spring meeting, FS vacancies: 5 vacancies, RAO filled with Phil Kettel, Fixed Wing filled with Hans Schlepler, GVC Air Attack back out on the street, Matt Coorley in place in HLN, Regional Aviation Safety filled with John Harris. ATGS in GVC only major open.
- Tentative plans for contracts:
 - Billings Exclusive Use

- Grangeville 150 day contract, Helena 180 day contract, CDA (modified CWN) – making more AA platforms in NR.
- Have an Aviation Mgr meeting end of Nov, hope to add Interagency Aviation group meeting as well.
- Great coordination with sharing aviation resources. Smokejumpers staffed several times this year.
- Success in Dispatch, overall went well in aviation dispatching even with many vacancies.
- Challenges:
 - Resources and staffing were limited once R1 came into fire season as resources were committed elsewhere.
 - Another comment was “validating if structures were really threatened” or not.
- 2 of the new FireFlies – UAS with IR cameras with 40 min flight time (also had PSD capabilities).
- IR needs: possibly End Product contract to fill need. Need to canvas vendors to see what they can produce and what we need to write a contract.
 - Ops cmt requested to keep this on the radar screen
- VLAT – Helena not listed as VLAT base so technically R1 doesn’t have one. Billings used as Temp base. Helena should be listed – it’s logically efficient.
 - Large AT coordinator in NIFC did not approve HLN last year as base.
 - Request to elevate this issue.
 - Granger suggests this be a NR issue, not just a FS or coordinator issue

ACTION ITEM: Ops cmt report/proposal on VLAT base identified in Helena (Jay Lindgren) to Corey Buhl for OPS recommendation to BOD

- IR capability: Need to look at alternative options for IR needs. What do we need to do and who works on it?
 - Ops and Aviation group – jointly. Ops the customer, Aviation the SME.

ACTION ITEM: IR Capability taskgroup. FAO call 10/11/18 will be first step (Jay and Bob will take forward). Taskgroup to be formed soon.

- Any improvement in getting people into Aviation positions? No. JT noted HEB1/HEB2 combined into HEBM which opens up opportunities to Air Support Group Sup trainees.

Hotshots – Fred Thompson

- No stats yet
- Meeting Nov 13/14 in Columbia Falls
- Chris chair Sean assistant chair
- “new average” year. FS crews did 7 full 14 day tours with 120 + days assigned. Some starting early/some starting later.
- Critical issue: Changed the requirements of SQUAD LEADER to CREW BOSS qualified so some crews had trouble meeting status due to that requirement.
- No known major movement.

Jumpers - Mahe

- MSO below average season for IA. Most business came from Panhandle and NW MT.

- Extended attack and Large fire support – 115 Single Resource assignments
- Hoping for future aviation assets coming online that will increase specific cargo needs.
- Any feedback for the MSO SMKJMPR program, please provide to the base.

IMT report - Judy

59 days of T1 Team use in GACC

51 T1 team use out of GACC

Total T1 IMT days = 171 days

162 T2 IMT days team use

Every team out of GACC

72 days out of GACC

62 days for teams from out of GACC

Mike Almas most days = 65 days

Connell = 33

Thompson = 36

Sampson = 29

Visiting NIMO team = 24 days

T3 team = 16 days

Turman only team to not have a NR assignment

Lucas' BUYT out 49 days

NR BUYT = 81 days total

In GACC 221 days of team use TOTAL

NR UTV/ATV new guidance review

- Feedback from Ashley – thought the forms were cumbersome but overall wasn't too bad to implement. Thinks could get rid of one IC approval on the form
- JT used the GB version while in the GB. Used the NR in NR. Thinks the form needs streamlining. Seems the IMT has to re-initiate the forms each time a team transitions. Form currently needs IC signature and when IMT transitions the whole process has to be completed again. Honestly, feels the form is process rather than accountability control.
 - Found during transition piece, even though the forms had been done, found they had to track down UTVs just to do the process.
- Perhaps potentially bringing accountability but too much process
- Turman: drafted an operator signature on the form to get the operator responsibilities in check. Found bringing the operator into the mix added accountability.
- GOV owned UTVs: Fred: found inconsistencies. Also interesting that we don't inspect vehicles/trucks/buggies but do inspect UTVs. Unqualified inspectors for UTVs. Inconsistent on what "qualification" is required – Driver's License or Redcard with UTV operator.
 - Contract UTVs should have oversight from the contractor for maintenance

- Corey recommends dropping agency machines from the process

ACTION ITEM: Corey will take issues to Sarah for edits / review of the process for 2019. Any further issues send to Corey to take forward prior to Biz meeting

Ops breakouts at IMT Meetings

- Potential topics:
 - Strategy discussion on how tactics and strategies are done on local units' fires. AA/local Fire managers engaging in on-the-ground tactics more than ever.
 - Perhaps there needs to be better more specific delegations
 - JT sees inconsistencies on AA delegation and local FMO direction – who are you working for and working with? Can be difficult at times.
 - Additional agencies coming to the table when not involved?
 - BOD having meeting with AAs – will bring up importance of Delegations of Authority. Put direction in the Delegation and allow the IMT to do their job.
- Ops cmt should be providing topics for the Team Meeting break outs.
 - Solicit topics from Ops personnel to either their zone or ICs for input into the NR level.
- Can add “how to elevate topics to the appropriate committee” to the Ops breakout.

ACTION ITEM: Paul Roose / Sam Gibbons lead for Ops Breakout at IMT meeting. Add these topics and submit more to Paul/Sam.

Contracting – Tim Murphy

- Contractors – average to below average season
- A few contractors going out of business who is selling off. Several new contractors coming in so anticipate same amount available.
- Drug Dogs – 2 years ago, Tim thought would be a good idea to have Drug Dogs check contractors. Tim worked with multiple agencies to have a dog come through inspection site. Both instances dogs alerted. Found that Dogs may come with some LEOs when ordered. 4-5 LEOs from out of GACC who had Dogs. AA has to identify what they want the dog to be doing if come with the LEO
- HETF: 1st year of new 3 year agreement. This year significantly different based on Ops, IMT, industry input. Core of the HETF same, but this year added 2nd transport that stays and can add options. Rule is cannot exceed 6 pieces of equipment.
 - Very few issues
 - AAR meeting Nov 1 bringing together AA, Industry, Ops, IMT
 - \$5 million spent on HETF
 - Peak 16 HETF's out – still had 15 available.
 - Questions now: Realize how much “product” can be put down – ex: 1 million board feet in 2 weeks.
 - Over achieved in putting together HETF availability
 - JT feedback: still see excellent viability but seeing how people are having difficulties adjusting strategies. Think it's a combo of IMT and AA both not adjusting.
 - Feel IMT should be advising AA on strategies and tactics. Pendulum may have swung too far.
 - Question: how to move the product? Tim feels that is out of suppression at that point.

- Have several HETS. Get them out there early on and they can fit all those puzzle pieces together.
 - Must still be mindful that resources needed to support those lines have to be available.
- Even had Big Iron in Glacier
- AIS: thinks the Equipment committee has come up with simple solutions for AIS. Some contractors trying to sell chemical.
- Passed out plan for solicitations for 2019.
 - FS adding tents
- Resource Lists: Have a contractor who is interested in hosting a website for lists. Lots easier for BUYTs. Nix ITEAMS
- South Africa crews: brought 16 FFs from South Africa and integrated into crews. Both companies moving forward with this and vice versa. Currently no GOV to GOV agreement. Only a contractor and sub-contractor deal.
 - ? on how many crews they can scale up to? Potentially up to 6 crews. Another company potentially up to 1000 FFs.

Meeting TIMING?

- Think about if this meeting is timed right or if should be happening later?
- Several/most committees and zones have not met yet.

Thursday, October 11th 0800-1500

Ops Meeting timeline?

- Critical that Ops meeting, Zone meetings, committee meetings PRIOR to the BOD meeting so issues can be elevated and worked through prior to the next field season. Would a FALL conference call meet the need? Fall BOD meeting is already packed with agenda items so if issues are not elevated, it misses the timeframe.
- NRCG BOD meeting is 3 weeks earlier this year and trickles down to all the other committees/zones to crunch in. Perhaps the BOD needs to meet later. AA meetings are also affecting the timeline. Generally the week before Thanksgiving has been when the BOD meets. This year is already set but for 2019, start consistency with when that meeting occurs.
- Now that the IC group meets separately and the IMTs are selected separately, the Ops meeting can be later.
- IMT meetings already set for the next 2 years for week of April 16-19th

ACTION ITEM:

NRCG BOD meeting will establish meeting time for week before Thanksgiving. Granger will take to the BOD for concurrence and send out a memo to the committees/zones with expectation that zones/committees meet prior to that.

OPS cmt meeting will occur later in the Fall so other committees have chance to meet. 1st week of November.

Dispatch Recruitment Retention

- Judy drafted a letter and forwarded to Corey identifying issues they have with recruitment and retain dispatchers in the current workforce. Has some options outlined that some private industries are doing for their employees. Still working on suggestions on how we can do things within the structure of our current organization but changing our model for how we keep these employees creating a better work environment in our dispatch centers.
- Have seen good employees taking downgrades just to get out dispatch. Feel there is a real issue with an unhappy workforce in a critical component on fire management.
- Big issues identified are: Pay (smaller issue), primarily EXPECTATIONS listed as main reason.
- Not having a GS-3 PD for dispatch is an issue on the East side. 90 days FF requirement limiting applicant pool. There is no one issue that fixes the issue: Housing, work:life balance, expectations, duties, # of centers to staff, pay, PDs, 90 day FF requirement, etc...
- Not going to solve it here, but need to get the message and the conversation started with managers.
- FF Apprentice Academy used to have dispatch requirement, but no longer. Recruiting tools keep dwindling.
- Do not see losing the 90 FF requirement since that limits the pool of people who would retain their secondary FF retirement. Could have small gains but not long term advantages.
- Ask all members to take this back to their units/zones.

Unit IDs

- Judy working on Unit IDs to clean them up and make sure they are all correct. Ex: VFDs, tribal, BIA, DES, etc...

Priority Trainees

- Main point: If you have any trainees on your unit, GET THEM ON THE LIST.
- Easy GOOGLE form to apply. Melissa will get updated form up on the site. FYI, the google form allows you to apply as a PT without supervisor approval.

ACTION ITEM: Craig will take that feedback back to Melissa to add a supervisor approval to the Google form. The OPS cmt doesn't care how it is done (checkbox, cc'd email, etc) just as long as it is included.

REM Modules

- Background: Several out of GACC IMTs who were adamant about getting REM on their incidents. Basically, do we want these in GACC?
- It's a tool for sure. Want to get ahead of it as it is going to come up again.
- What it is and what it isn't. The way it is presented is an issue. Sometimes sold as EMTs/Paramedics but ultimately are THSPs. Some may be or not.
- Worry that risk management was being adjusted with the REM as a crutch.
- Fred recommends putting the investment in our IHC crews to get this training rather than adding a REM module.
- Craig feels this is just another tool that we can better take care of our FFs on the ground. Would like to see it developed further so we have options.
- Mahe feels we already have some version of this already on every fire, but we don't call it REM. Fred notes we don't need doctors in the field, we need way to get them out to care.

- Different perceptions of how to meet Dutch Creek protocols. Should be looked at differently on each incident. Craig found one gap in ALS ambulances (either air/ground) that EMS personnel must stay with that vessel.
- Granger feels we may just need to acknowledge we have some of this capability already.
- Still an Agency Administrator decision regardless of what BOD or Ops committee recommends. Would hope we still have some latitude to advise our AAs.
- Tim feels we still don't know what the REM really was. AA was continuously hit with adapting definition until it fit the box so IMT could get it.
- We need to better educate our AAs on what the tools are and what tools are already in place so they can make an educated decision.
- Develop some capacity within NR. If contracted, we need to come up with set of standards. Does this go contract or Fire Departments?
- Define what RAPID EXTRACTION CAPABILITY is and if do not have

ACTION ITEM: DEFINE what a REM is and what our guidelines are for NR. By Spring meeting, have a BRIEFING PAPER completed on what REM is, what capabilities are, what already exists in NR and briefing/talking points for AAs for consideration.

Jeff Gardner, MT Fire Chiefs Assoc., IHC rep, Smokejumper Rep, IC rep, DNRC rep, Tim Murphy

Northern Rockies Critical Mission Force

- Concept of keeping "control" of some critical resources back at NR and IMTs submit critical needs. Concept was approved and will go forward with concept and develop further.
- Grabbed a concept form and process from PNW and building for NR. Tool development for critical resources to complete missions then move those on to another mission.
- This summer 2018, fire season didn't elevate enough to test it.
- Critical mission requests can identify what resources they need for what mission and for how long. Do not want to pre-build a "task force" since each incident will have different requests. NR OPS will have to then fill that need with negotiations based on what is available. Critical missions almost always need IHCs.
- Certainly a timing issue and some challenges. Whole concept is due to limited resources but to win, must keep back some resources. Ultimately trying to fix spreading each incident thin and can't complete their missions (just holding on), but if had more resources could complete a mission and move on.
- Has potential to get bogged down at the MAC level.
- Ask group to put some thought into this for implementation. Identify pitfalls, ways to overcome, coordinate with other components. Has implications with Finance, Business, Dispatch, etc... Must be streamlined and expedited outside of normal operating business. For example: Resource Orders, Check in/out, inspections, timesheets, etc...
- Need trust in forward operator to not waste time. Forward operator comes in day early, meets with Ops, looks at ground, etc... strategy is set and worked out with forward operator. IHC sups (or managers) must have trust in the Forward Operator to buy off on plan without own familiarity with the ground. Ideally, keep to in-region crews so trust is there. May need to marry out of region crews with in region crew. Forward operator is conduit with mission group, MAC, Craig/Ops, incidents.
- Already tied in with Aviation folks on concept.
- Drive time a concern – logistical concerns. 4 days is about the "sweet spot".

ACTION ITEM: Get concerns/thoughts/feedback to Corey. A taskgroup working on this is in place. Get on IC meeting agenda. Needs a Dispatch rep to the group.

Heavy Equipment Boss

- Ops cmt white paper on HEQB – proposal to have 1 HEQB manage more than one piece of Heavy Equipment. Question brought up if we have the authority to make that decision? NMAC determined did not have authority to declare 1 HEQB for >1 piece of Iron. Other options to push forward is to go through agency leads not NRCG. On the ground it happens anyway. If something were to happen, who's responsible?
- Redbook doesn't touch the states. 310-1 addresses Single Resource manages Single Resource. Tim proposes going after change to the 310-1.
- Where is the right angle to address this and make an appropriate change? Redbook is out for review now so would need to be before January. Comment period ends Nov 1.
- 310-1 issued October so would be for 2019 version.
- Shortage of HEQB isn't going away so even a long term solution gets somewhere.
- Idea: Strike Team – Heavy Equipment.

ACTION ITEM: Taskgroup Corey, Granger and group revisit the white paper and present it as a 310-1 change. Review/edit white paper and present to BOD for Oct meeting and work through CGAC.

T2IA crew – vehicle requirement

- No traction in getting a vehicle requirement added back into Redbook / mob guide for T2IA crews. Currently only break down capable, but not listed as VEHICLE. We want to have flexibility to fly crews but still want to know if they are capable of driving a vehicle. Ex: can be issued rental vehicles and legally drive them.

Suppression Modules in lieu of Crews

- Develop for next meeting discussion

Next Meeting:

March 12-13, 2019 at Helena, MT Forest Service office