

# Northern Rockies Operations Committee

Location: Teams meeting

Tuesday March 9, 2021 (0900-1230)

**Attendees:**

Andy Schell  
Corey Buhl  
Ashley Sites  
Jeremy Harker  
Amanda Boatright  
Fred Thompson  
Melissa Wegner  
Kathy Pipkin  
Bryce Rogers  
Chris Loraas  
John Thompson  
David Lee  
Ryan Patrick  
Andy Schell  
Mike Goicoechea  
Mike Granger  
Joe Sampson  
John Monzie  
Kendal Wilson  
Jordan McKnight  
Scott McAvoy  
Shawn Borgen  
Julie Sullens

## **NR Operations Committee Meeting – March 9, 2021.**

### **NRTC (Melissa Wegner)**

- All classes are a go- virtually. Using FireNet Teams as well as other platforms. Has been very successful, only burn boss class offered in the nation. Only classes that were canceled were contractor led course.
- Opened up nominations with more coaches which has led to more training than when in person. Accepted everyone who was nominated that completed their prework and passes pre-exam. Accepted all NR students and opened to OGA students.
- Training priority list application is out on MS Forms. 141 applicants so far, expecting closer to 400. Looking for more applicants.
- Rosie's position will not be filled due to not being on the Org Chart any longer. Did hire staff support over winter, will use for some of Rosie's duties while keeping within PD.

### **NRCC (Kathy Pipkin)**

- Working on finalizing IMT selections spreadsheet for BOD approval.
- Currently no overhead coordinator position. When Barb retired that funding went to the USFS Contracting program so position will not be filled. Duties picked up by crew coordinators and others.
- Intel Specialist Teresa Sage is onboard.
- Currently working through the Mob Guide. Will make proposal next fall to make the Mob Guide a living document rather than publish, follows what others geographic areas are doing.
- Selection made on Aviation Coordinator, hopefully will announce soon.
- Assistant Center Manager position will hopefully be out later this week. Meteorologist position is currently out.

**Fire Cache** – no report

### **Operations Officer**

- Corey Buhl will be detailed starting next week. New PD being classified and hope to advertise in the next 2-3 weeks.

### **NRCG – Mike Granger reporting**

- transition from the previous chair has been made, but Rich Cowger is currently the acting chair as vice chair
- April 5<sup>th</sup> meeting, also week of virtual IMT meetings.
- Granger is going to be retiring, position has been advertised and closed. Hope is to have it filled and at the meeting April 5<sup>th</sup>.
- BOD will be approving IMT selections at next meeting. There have been some resources out supporting ESF 4 for vaccinations.

### **WFM Tasking Update - McKnight**

- Admin side is ready, including a document that looks like a task book, but is not a task book that outlines the certification requirements. About 60% of the way there, waiting for training season to recede a bit to get the process completed. Looking to be able to do in person as well as virtual, depending on needs. Hopefully have a good package by early summer.

### **Heavy Equipment Inspection Update- Ryan Patrick**

- Tasked to review current heavy equipment inspection process. Jordan volunteered and put together a group.
- Met for first time last week (3<sup>rd</sup>), went through current inspection process and discussed alternatives. Discussed what final product will look like for NRCG, currently working on finalizing everything from that meeting to get ready to send out. Hope to present document to NRCG at the spring meeting.

### **Engine Staffing and Type 2 IA Crew Documents for Consideration – Andy Schell**

- Consider Type 2IA and Type 2 crew standards and Type 4-7 standards. Dropping from 18 to 15 personnel for the crews and 3 to 2 for engines.
- BLM already recognizes 15 as the standard for crews and looking to update their red book.
- (Jordan McKnight) USFS has discussed and is not planning on doing the same thing. Might be some room to establish a floor, but it sounds like USFS is not going to go that way for the crews.
- (Shawn Borgen) Likes the idea of the flexibility to keep those crews viable. Nationally, hot shots not going to be updating standards.
- (Kathy Pipkin) RMCG and BLM have done this, but other places have not. Any time we can do less than the accepted standard, we reach out to the receiving geographic area to make sure they accept it. Even if we did something within our GACC it would only be for our GACC and we would still have to get approval from receiving GACCs to accept them. For engine staffing, there are considerations on how will this affect our contracts and will also affect the agreements that the State has in place with their cooperators?
- (John Monzie) Don't have a lot of heartburn over making it a minimum. State standard is 2 persons, but State sees the benefit to having the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. Consider setting up as a minimum standard.
- (Mike Granger) As an Ops Chief, if there is a choice of accepting a crew or engine at a reduced staffing level over no crew or engine, always going to accept the reduced resource. Covid made staffing difficult, which reduced resources. If we reduce the standard, it may create more resource availability for all of us. USFS may not accept that standard, but not all of the crews and not all of the engines are USFS.
- (Andrew Schell) Believes this will create more flexibility, especially with Covid protocols. Thinks it would be utilized for Engines mostly during initial attack.
- (Julia Sullens) IDL doesn't always have 3 people on an engine, this creates more flexibility
- (Ashley Sites – SC Zone) – Can live with 2 as a minimum, better than nothing.
- Committee vote: YES to recommend accepting 15 person T2IA and T2 crews and 2 person engines T4-7 as a minimum staffing requirement. **Action Item: Andy will draft up a**

**recommendation for NRCG to follow suit with lowering minimum staffing on Type 4,5,6,7 from 3 to 2 and from 18 to 15 on Type 2 IA and Type 2 crews.**

### **Type 3 IMTs - McKnight**

- Work force investment discussion within USFS at the pod level.
- Having more formalized T3 teams would be beneficial, is there a need to expand and formalize our T3 organization and provide some avenues for doing that?
- (Shawn Borgen) Are you suggesting that we're going to hire or move people into permanent jobs related to these positions? (Jordan) Effort is to identify gaps in our existing organization and part of that is identify challenges. Bolstering T3 organizations to help reduce T1 and T2 call outs, not talking permanent positions or anything like that. Just looking to see if, on an interagency basis, is there a need to try to formalize T3 organizations.
- (Joe Sampson) There is no doubt there is a need for more organized teams, regardless of the level. We actually have formalized T3 teams, but a lot of those teams are stood up by T1 and T2 team members. Issues on whether we have the capacity within the area to do that. Had the T3 ICs to engage in the IC committee for the past few years.
- (Ashley Sites) SC Zone has been talking about it and think there is a need for it and are going to take a stab at it this year in the form of the NW Zone. Experiencing same problems that Joe mentioned, but the zone is going to try it.
- (Andy) We're having problems with the succession plans with the T1 and T2s already.
- (Jeremy Harker) in the NWZ zone those T3 teams ebb and flow with the level of staffing within the zone. Had problems staffing the IC positions the last few years. It's a moving target.
- (Jordan) Some of the discussion was if we looked at a bigger than zone level, perhaps that would help fill out those position. Also the thought that there may be people that can't make the commitment to the T1 and T2 teams. Not hearing that there is really a need to engage further at this time. **No action at this time.**

### **Agency Duty Officer - McKnight**

- A lot of USFS units are going to be having some key vacancies. Will be looking for some duty officer coverage. What is the impact to interagency partners? What can we do to better ensure service provided to our partners? Is there an opportunity to share duty officers with other agencies? What other key vacancies might other agencies have?
- (Harker- NPS) All about pursuing joint DO opportunities with neighbors within the zone.
- (Andrew) Not uncommon for us to bring in DOs when people are out with IMTs. Support looking at interagency DOs given the location of the refugees because they're in interagency environments. Need to ensure that the partners trust each other enough to do that. Hardest part will be handing over the reins to your neighboring agency.
- (Jordan) Challenges with not knowing interagency partners and having those relationships.
- (Bryce) It would be good and helpful, as far as the BIA side it could be somewhat cumbersome due to the tribal interactions. But if someone is willing to learn the processes it is do-able and would like to explore that in the future. Have someone shadow, we're short handed as it is so difficult to support our partners. Currently bring up detailers from other Regions, not a bad idea to bring in fresh, new people.

- (Shawn) Last year, the hotshot crews did a lot of T3 support and getting assigned to local units. Did not hear a lot of negative feedback on the caliber of the DOs, things were good from our perspective. **Did not hear any calls for action.**

#### **Zone and Agency Updates:**

- **North Idaho Zone and IDL** (Julia): Josh Harvey is the bureau chief, should be back to work in a few weeks after his accident. Representation on various has been split up differently than in the past. Waiting on budget information for this month and looking to convert some temporary positions to be permanent. No zone update.
- **Northwest Zone/NPS** (Jeremy): Haven't had zone meeting yet. Coordinating with getting vaccinations scheduled for wildland fire responders in the zone. Nothing from the NPS at this time.
- **BLM** (Corey): Aaron Thompson is looking within the BLM for a detailer for Corey's position. Hope to have vice-Goodell position advertised within the few week. Cathy has been working on the Assist. Center Manager position and it has been hung up in HR but hoping it will be out within the next week.
- **Eastern Zone** (Scott McAvoy): East Zone meeting updates, BLM FMO job was advertised and closed and conducting interviews. BLM got Engine Captains to GS-8. Seasonal hiring and filling some permanent positions. BDC is going to do a year detail for the Assistant Center Manager, announcement should be coming out soon. Smokejumper base manager needs to be filled, USFS will host T1 helicopter in June. East Zone MAC group never met last year, and group thinks they may have missed the boat given the activity levels, looking to have MAC meetings this year.
- **USFS** (Jordan): Fair amount of turnover this summer, how much is still to be determined. Grants/Coop Agreement Specialist is retiring. Some shifting in management at the AFD due to various details.
- **BIA** (Bryce): Restructured Org Chart at the Regional Level, it has been challenging. 2 units that are discussing Tier 4 to Tier 3. Ft. Peck has moved to Lewistown and Northern Cheyenne is discussing moving to Miles City. Regional AFMO and 2 Assistant Helicopter Managers that have been sent to HR, hopefully those will be advertised. Working on a transfer request for Crow Helicopter Manager vacancy. Have a few updates to the NAC Plan, pushing for April to get it out and reviewed and then signed by the chair.
- **FWS** (Andrew): Mike is retiring at the end of April; position is out and hopefully that position will be filled before season. Will be backfilling one position that is on a detail to the smokejumper base.
- **SW Zone**: no rep
- **Central Zone**: Beaverhead-Deerlodge and Custer Gallatin will both be losing 2 FMSs and their AFOs. HLF will be losing the Deputy Fire Staff, hope to be in place in late June. CLO DNRC is fully staffed. Working strategy for Aviation coverage for the coverage for the eastern side of Montana.
- **DNRC** (John Monzie): New Governor and new director, still working on policy changes. Currently in the middle of a legislative session, so far budget and staffing has not been cut. Do have a proposal to add an aviation position to office in Billings. Vacant FMO and AFMO positions in Billings.

- **SC Zone (Ashley):** No zone meeting yet. Vacancies within the zone that haven't been able to fill. Working to put together a T3 team. Bozeman Dispatch is running a Center Manager and Assistant Dispatcher, been unable to fill positions below that.

**Business (Amanda):**

- NERV is being re-worked to make the program sustainable. 4 national, interagency task groups have been looking at the program to come up with new processes to make the program sustainable. Everyone recognizes the need for NERV exists, but at the current pace and with the problems encountered we cannot maintain it. Updated forms and SOPs are currently in draft form with the group looking to finalize before southern fire season. Couple important changes, if things stay as discussed now, would be that vehicles cannot be transferred. This is due to the need for accountability and a way to track claims and identify trends. Ground support vehicles will still be available. Proposed changes will impact dispatch, they've been included on the task groups.
- There is a national task group working on electronic filing naming conventions and best practices for fire. They're working to have guidance out soon in anticipation of southern fire season. Working with FireNet to incorporate the standard file format so that it is preloaded into the FireNet Team for the incident when it is created. Not developing SOPs because the task group recognizes that every FSC needs to have that autonomy to run their section as needed based upon the incident needs, so they're working on "best practices" that mimic the paper doc box work flow, in order to help alleviate some of the challenges faced this year with payments being missed by host agencies due to electronic filing issues.
- Business Committee meeting is next week, March 16 and 17. Working on the supplements and expect to have those out by April 1<sup>st</sup>, which is our yearly internal deadline. We're expecting updates to the yellow book nationally and believe a new yellow book will be released in April or May this year.
- Committee is working toward hosting our Incident Finance Webinars, sent out "Save the Date" announcement a few weeks ago. Currently finalizing the agenda and will then be sending that info out. Splitting the webinars up this year instead of doing a weeklong session as we have in the past, we're aware of everyone's schedules being busy with virtual trainings and meetings. Webinars are May 10, May 12, and May 17.

**IC Group (Joe Sampson):**

- Met on Feb 18<sup>th</sup> and went over applicants. Had a few teams that required everyone to re-apply. Currently have 7 teams, Mike Almas is being sponsored and will still be the IC despite his retirement.
- April 5<sup>th</sup> is the virtual IMT meetings. ICs are encouraging their Section Chiefs to continue attending the IMRR calls.
- Next meeting is March 16<sup>th</sup> and will be discussing some of the interagency workforce development stuff.
- (Goicoechea) AC/IC Updates: Starting to see that the model that we are currently using is not going to last so they're making a push to begin resolving those issues. There are some geographic areas that are going to begin experimenting with it as early as this summer. There are some concerns with it as well.

- A lot of efforts to standardize processes and work.
- Tested distributed operations model of the ICP away from the forward operating base and then having spike camps. Don't see that going away and instead see it being enhanced and the Logistics group is working to make that better. Help people get better rest and help mitigate Covid concerns as well as camp crud issues. Haven't talked about the IWDG yet as an IC committee.

#### **Training (Andy)**

- Haven't met yet as a committee. Priority trainee application is out.

#### **Dispatch (David Lee)**

- Putting together the Dispatcher Workshop starting on Monday, April 26<sup>th</sup>.
- Porta potty solicitation has not been countersigned by USFS and it will potentially affect getting porta potties out to incidents.

#### **Hotshots (Shawn/Fred):**

- (Shawn) Expect 6 hotshot crews again, have a couple of messages over to Chief Mountain and haven't heard back. All other FS crews are looking at recertifying as T1 again. Looking at a better way to stagger, 2 crews start up in mid-April, 1 crew available 1<sup>st</sup> of May, and 2 crews available mid-May, and last crew available end of May/beginning of June.
- R1 crews right in the middle of the statistics: availability average 157 days; 14,900 crew days; 16 days per crew traveling; all crews did about 6 full tours; injuries 75 lost work time injuries (less than 1 per crew average); total miles driven 4,350,901 miles total by crew average of 47,000 per crew; 15 vehicle incidents, no lost time injuries related to those incidents; average personnel per crew 21, probably looking at a 22 person average this year – most crews overhired this year; contributions outside of large fire support – treat close to 50,000 acres; 140 known Covid-19 cases – 314 hotshot days, across all regions.
- (Fred) Putting a lot of emphasis with IWDG. Looking at what it costs for a hotshot crew. 1 PFT sup, 1 PFT assist, and others (squad leaders/senior firefighters) @ 13 pay periods – some are moving squad leaders to 18/8.
- (Fred) R1 IHC crews are under a 14 pay period budget currently. As is, crews will not be available in September (won't be available for the end of the NR season) and will not be available for training purposes under the current model. PFTs had been working about 17-18 pay periods, this worked with p-code savings. Need \$3,500-\$4,000 per firefighter to support needs for saws/supplies. About \$20,000 in S #s last year to maintain saws, not replace saws.
- (Fred) We can come to the ICP and check everything out. We can play games if you want. We need 18/8 PSEs, \$3400 per FF in support and \$40,000 to \$45,000 to maintain our saw fleet. Also, medical inventory and vehicle fleet costs.
- (Corey) 1<sup>st</sup> heard of national USFS budgeting process, is this just R1 issue? (Fred) They're budgeting by zone and all the budgets are being managed by the RO and they're setting aside the money to fund the PFTs and then giving permanent seasonals enough funding for 1 additional pay period.

- (Jordan) Explained new budget process and how Budget Officers are determining how much each program receives. It is affecting more than just the Hotshots, although it's more acute for their programs.
- Decision made that a briefing paper will be written to bring up the issue up to the BOD at the spring meeting. Most interagency partners were unaware of the changes and it is going to affect everyone.

#### **Jumpers and WFM (Jordan)**

- 3 jump bases are all planning to be fully staffed this year. Still planning on support R3 but still having resources available for early season. Base should be fully operational by early June. Vacancies at West Yellowstone base manager; otherwise no critical vacancies.
- 2 T1 modules are going to be up and running and fully staffed. T2 modules had some vacancies, not sure where they are on being fully staffed. Possibly won't be able to meet T2 status, but unsure at this time. Could still be ordered as a module.

**Next Meeting date: October 13, 2021**

#### **Action Items**

- **Letter on minimum crew staffing for T2, T2IA and Engines.**
- **Letter on USFS funding model affecting the IHC crews and other resources.**
- **Recommendations on heavy equipment inspections coming from the Task Group.**