



# Northern Rockies Coordinating Group

*Federal, State, and Local Government Agencies working together in  
Emergency Response Management*

Date: July 1, 2024 NRCG Memo# 2024-008  
To: Northern Rockies Interagency Wildland Fire Community  
From: Chair, Northern Rockies Coordinating Group  
Subject: Northern Rockies Geographic Area Dispatch Improvement and Implementation Effort

**Issue:** There is a critical need to deliver organizational solutions and business strategies that, when implemented, will support an effective and sustainable dispatch organization fully capable of meeting present demands and which can readily adapt to a changing future strategic environment and new demands.

**Background:** In 2008, the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior completed and released the “Management Efficiency Assessment of the Interagency Wildland Fire Dispatch and Related Services.” Agency leadership was briefed on the results and agreed that the issues and recommendations should be addressed. However, no specific mechanism or plan was developed. In 2009, the Interagency Interoperability Oversight Group (IIOG) examined the results of the study along with the issues in law enforcement dispatch and dispatch for other field going personnel. With this initiative, managers of all agencies have identified that there is a critical need to modernize and improve the operational efficiency of our radio programs and dispatch centers throughout the various geographic areas. The Interagency Dispatch Implementation Project (IDIP) web site is as follows:

<https://forestsandrangelands.gov/WFIT/applications/IDIP/index.shtml>

It contains the most updated information on the Interagency Dispatch Implementation Project.

It is recognized that as agencies work to develop and implement dispatch improvement projects throughout the Northern Rockies agencies, zones and centers will all have different timelines and factors both short term and long term they will have to consider throughout this process. As dispatch improvement projects are identified and approved it will create several projects that will be in different phases of implementation throughout the geographic area. It is the intent of NRCG to ensure a proactive approach and support to dispatch improvement projects through interagency coordination and planning with agencies at the local level, subject matter experts and dispatch staff at the zone level to include the NRCG dispatch steering committee. With the expectation that when dispatch improvement projects are developed and approved by NRCG, the Zone and NRCG Dispatch steering committee will work with the effected dispatch functions to accomplish and implement the improvement project.



In Northern Rockies from January – May 2023, the Dispatch Improvement Phase 1 Task Group conducted initial data gathering and analysis with all dispatch centers in the geographic area. The top four areas that needed further attention were Capacity and Staffing, Infrastructure needs, Tech Requirements and Support, and Partnerships/Collaboration. Additionally, it was recommended a Dispatch Improvement Phase 2 Task Group be put together to give these issues a deep dive and make recommendations to the Northern Rockies Coordinating Group (NRCG).

The Dispatch Improvement Phase 2 Task Group convened on July 15, 2023, and began work on this task. What became very apparent was that all the areas the Phase 1 group brought forward fell under the big picture question of how many centers are needed to provide safe and effective services to the field and where should they be located?

In November of 2023, the Dispatch Improvement Phase 2 Task Group presented a recommendation to the NRCG which stated: ***Understanding that there will be short term and long-term needs, we are recommending that work towards an adequate number of centers per zone that can provide safe and effective service to the field be given a hard look and a plan developed. A reduction in centers per zone is expected.*** All agencies in attendance were in support of the recommendation, with the exception of Idaho Department of Lands, who abstained from the vote. On January 16, the NRCG board approved the recommendation for Kootenai to move to Flathead, Bitterroot to Missoula, Great Falls to Helena and the consolidation of Grangeville and Coeur d’Alene.

**Goal:**

Efficient and sustainable dispatch structure, operations and associated radio infrastructures are critical to the safety of our employees as well as the effectiveness of each agency’s mission.

**Long Term Action Plan:** Provide support to those zones and centers who are working to develop or implement dispatch improvement projects. Additionally, work with local Board of Director (BOD) groups whose centers have not made decisions on dispatch improvement projects. The Action Items below provide a framework for a course of action along with the responsible group listed in parentheses:

**Action Item 1:**

Northern Rockies Geographic Area Wildland Fire Agency Administrators

The Wildland Fire Agency Administrators Group is comprised of senior leadership personnel from the Northern Rockies geographic area. The WFAA’s tasked NRCG to undertake effort to improve the NRCG dispatch system.

**Action Item 2:**

Identify a Dispatch Improvement Task Group (DITG)

The Task Group working under the direction of NRCG and is made up of the following representative and is responsible to formulate dispatch improvement project recommendations with zones and facilitate recommendations back up to NRCG for a decision with WFAA’s.



- USFS, BLM, BIA, USFWS line officers
- Montana, Idaho and North Dakota line officer
- NRCG Dispatch Steering Committee Representative
- Zone representation when applicable.

**Action Item 3:**

Dispatch Improvement Task Group (DITG) Action Items

- Organizing information and analysis of dispatch and infrastructure issues within the Northern Rockies geographic area (see phase 1 product).
- Develop standards for complex interagency dispatch centers that will best fit the needs of the NRCG Interagency dispatch coordination system (reference phase 2 - dispatch improvement tasks).
  - Organizational structure and staffing
  - Specifications for facilities and functional space
  - Technology and communication capabilities

**Actions that require engagement with local Zone BOD's and Agency Representatives**

- For the East Zone by November 2024, develop a dispatch improvement project recommendation to modernize the current dispatch system configuration to ensure a long-term sustainable solution to carry out safe and effective operations for all agencies involved. This includes number of centers, size and capabilities of the dispatch/mobilization system in the zone. The East Zone should also coordinate with the Central Zone where overlap in coverage currently occurs to ensure long term success of operations.
- For the North Idaho, Northwest, Southwest and Central zones by November 2024, initiate dispatch improvement plan for the following decisions: Kootenai to Flathead, Bitterroot to Missoula, Great Falls to Helena and the consolidation of Grangeville to Coeur d'Alene. Phase 2 Group should reach out before July 15<sup>th</sup> to see what if any support the local BODs need from that group.

**Action Item 4:**

Develop proposal for outstanding staffing needs associated with Dispatch Centers (DITG)

- Develop a proposal for staffing based on the standard for dispatch structure and staffing (action item 3) and current staffing.
- NRCG & WFAA finalizes proposed standard organization for Dispatch Centers and proposal for staffing before the main hiring season kicks off in the fall of 2024.
- Agency representatives confirm that position descriptions are in place.



**Action Item 5:**

Identify Current Governance of Dispatch Centers (DITG)

- Identify interagency dispatch center financial plan template.
- Identify current dispatch center financial plans.
- Identify makeup and involvement of Dispatch Boards.
- Identify and take into consideration existing agreements with cooperators, state, federal and local partners.
- Center facilities locations and current partnerships.
- Political issues identified for each center (i.e. border, EMS, 911).

**Action Item 6:**

Dispatch Improvement Plans

Once Dispatch Improvement Project decisions are made local zone BOD's, local line officers and agency subject matter expert representatives will work to implement the plan through support from the NRCG Dispatch Steering Committee.

- Zone Chairs are expected to provide Spring and Fall implementation plan updates to NRCG.

Rich Cowger  
Chair, Northern Rockies Coordinating Group

