



Southwest Coordinating Group Operating Guide

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Introduction

Agency policies and interagency agreements mandate that Southwest (SW) Area wildland fire agencies manage wildfire and, at times, other all-risk incidents (e.g., floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes). All Southwest Coordinating Group (SWCG) members are delegated representatives for their agencies at the direction of their Agency Administrators. All agencies require that agreements be pursued with cooperators at all levels to facilitate efficient fire management activities. A cost-effective sharing of resources among public agencies is expected by the public and Congress. Southwest agencies fully support this concept.

The purpose of the SWCG Operating Plan is to provide management direction for cooperation, standardization, and operational guidelines for fire and incident management activities in the SW Area. The operating plan provides consistency and continuity between agencies signatory to the [Memorandum of Understanding for Operation of SWCG](#).

Mission, Purpose, and Organization

Mission of the Southwest Coordinating Group

The mission of the SWCG is to enhance the safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of wildland fire management activities and to support approved non-fire emergencies.

Purpose of the Southwest Coordinating Group

The SWCG's purpose is to provide a forum for understanding and implementing interagency policy, direction, and coordination to the Zone Coordinating Groups (ZCGs) and the Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) for fire and incident management activities.

- The SWCG's goal is to provide a cooperative interagency forum seeking consistency in fire and incident management within the SW Area.
- The SWCG implements procedures and standards to coordinate fire management programs of the participating agencies to avoid duplication and to provide a framework of constructive cooperation.
- The SWCG shall provide for multi-agency coordination, facilitate information exchange between agencies, and monitor and evaluate the performance of the Interagency Dispatch Centers and the SWCC.

Relationship to Joint Powers/State Master Agreements

The Memorandum of Understanding for the Operation of SWCG (SWCG MOU) supplements the Joint Powers / State Master Agreement between the States of Arizona and New Mexico and the Federal Agencies.

Organization

The SWCG and supporting organizations establish a degree of standardization to conform to national guidelines while allowing interagency coordination and cooperation to meet the needs of the agencies. The SWCG maintains written procedures and

guidelines to ensure continuity in direction and cooperation. The SW Area fire and SWCG organizational chart are outlined below:



Southwest Area Fire and SWCG Organizational Chart



Authority and Responsibilities

Scope of Operation

- The SWCG represents the interests of the senior executive leadership of the federal, state, and local government agencies represented by the SWCG MOU. The SWCG representatives will communicate to individual Agency Administrators any recommendations to establish significant new policies in fire or incident management before implementation. The SWCG provides general oversight and direction for the fire management programs throughout the SW Area.
- The primary cooperating agencies are the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the States of Arizona and New Mexico. The SWCG is focused on fire management, incident management, fuels/smoke management activities, and all-risk incidents in the SW Area.

Southwest Coordinating Group Authority and Responsibilities

Members of the SWCG have delegated authority to act on behalf of their respective agencies for purposes of planning, priority setting, and implementation of current agency policies, directions, and standards for fire and incident management activities.

SWCG delegated members have the authority to identify alternate members to act on their behalf with full authority and participation.

Related activities include:

- Ensure that the Southwest Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization, the SWCG Operating Plan, Complex Incident Management, Buying Team, and MAC Operating Guides current and updated.
- Provide specific direction and guidance to:
 - Southwest Coordination Center
 - Zone Coordinating Groups, Committees, and Dispatch Centers
 - National shared resources
 - SW Area CIMTs
- Provide incident and situation intelligence.
- Convene MAC Group during periods of high fire activity.
- Review and develop State Master/Joint Powers Agreements.
- Coordinate fire restrictions and closures including Prevention Teams.
- Coordinate with the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC).
- Represent the SW Area on the Coordinating Group Advisory Council (CGAC).
- Coordinate interagency fire information that affects the SW Area.
- Facilitate resolution of SW Area fire management issues.

- Establish priorities for repositioning and deployment of fire suppression resources based on an evaluation of current/predicted fire activity and firefighting resource availability, and communicate these priorities to the SWCC Center Manager for implementation.

Southwest Coordinating Group Management

Chair Rotation

The Chair and Vice-Chair will hold tenure for two years, and the vice-chair will normally follow the chair's tenure. The rotation is as follows:

- BIA – Western Region
- BLM – New Mexico State Office
- BIA – Southwest Region
- FWS – Southwest Region
- BIA – Navajo Region
- Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management
- FS – Southwestern Region
- BLM – Arizona State Office
- NPS – Intermountain Region
- State of New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources – Forestry Division

Chair and Vice-Chair Duties and Responsibilities

- Responsible for the follow-up to ensure the implementation of SWCG actions.
- Receives issues for study and resolution from member agencies and Southwest Agency Administrators. When receiving issues, the chair will obtain identification of the task to be completed, the scope and the product to be delivered, and a timeframe for completion.
- Manages SWCG activities. Delegates and manages assignments given to SWCG liaisons to committees, task groups, and Zones.
- Monitors fire activity and resource shortages with the SWCG membership and convenes Southwest MAC Group as identified in the MAC Operating Guide.
- Represents SWCG to other GACCs, NMAC, CGAC, and various national groups.
 - The SW CGAC Representative will be the SWCG Chair during their two-year tenure.
- Works with SWCG Executive Assistant to establish time and place of SWCG meetings, prepares and distributes agenda, assembles material to be acted upon by the SWCG, and convenes and facilitates SWCG business meetings.
- The Vice-Chair assumes the duties and responsibilities of the Chair as directed or during the absence of the Chair.

Executive Assistant

An Executive Assistant will be designated by the SWCG Chair during their tenure. The duties include working with the chair to:

- Coordinate agenda items with the Chair/Vice-Chair for meetings
- Forward meeting agendas, locations, and information to members
- Record and maintain meeting notes, decisions, and action items
- Send materials in advance of meetings for review
- Follow through on contacts, requests from SWCG, and designated administrative requests.
- Coordinate closely with the SWCC Center Manager
- Coordinate SWCG information and documents on the SWCC website.

Members

- Research background information on assigned tasks, and work collaboratively with other members of SWCG so projects are completed to the highest standards and within assigned time frames.
- Serve as a conduit between SWCG and their agency to identify issues and develop guidance for resolution.
- Costs for time and travel for participation in SWCG will be borne by the member's agency.
- Provide feedback on the SWCC Center Manager's performance to the supervisor of record.
- Assist in reviewing and revising SWCG Operating Plan and guidance documents.
- Participate in the collaborative management of IMTs including roster selection, reviewing performance evaluations, attends incident closeouts, etc.
- Coordinate SW Area training activities and nominations for national-level training courses.
- Represent SWCG as Liaison to SW Fire Management Zone and SW committees.

Meeting Scheduling

The SWCG generally will meet on annual schedule identified below:

SWCG Meeting and IMT Selections	Middle to Late January
SWCG/IMT Meeting	Middle of February
SWCG Meeting (with MAC Exercise)	Late March
SWCG Meeting (Teams Meeting)	May
SWCG Meeting/MAC AAR (pre-IC AAR)	September
SWCG Meeting (IC AAR, with Committees and Zones), update all SWCG documents, SWCC AOP	October/November

Meeting Business Rules

Decisions will be reached by a quorum of >50% of SWCG members present and recorded in the notes as such. If it is determined that additional information is required for a decision to be made, then it may be “tabled” for a later date, or assignments may be made to resolve the item. New action items will be reviewed at the end of the meeting to assure clarity and understanding. All decisions will include the process to disseminate the information to the appropriate persons, and the determination of who those persons are, and the identification of follow-up actions associated with the decision, i.e. development processes to implement decisions, including due date.

Presenters and Presentations

Presenters are expected to submit a concise summary of their presentation to the Chairperson when submitting an agenda item. If materials must be presented, they need to bring enough copies for the members at the time of presentation. Presentations should be identified in advance as informational, decisional, or recommendation needed, and as brief and to the point as possible. There must be adequate time for questions by members after the presentation. Presentations submitted in advance of the meeting will usually receive higher priority than ad-hoc agenda items.

Executive Sessions

The Executive Session portion of the SWCG meeting is intended for primary members only to discuss sensitive matters. Decisions concerning authorization of funds, personnel matters, or sensitive issues may be reserved to an Executive Session by request of any member.

Action Items

Any action items from the meeting(s) will be recorded and tracked on the SWCG Action Items Tracking Sheet which is maintained and archived by the SWCG.

Committees

The SWCG will establish committees as necessary to carry out functional work or special projects. Committees are an interagency association of members whose responsibilities include providing the SWCG with recommendations, which will advance the operational value of the functional area. Committees are considered as a permanent part of the SWCG and have a charter. Charters will be approved by the SWCG. Standing SWCG Committees are listed on the SWCC website. Generally, tasks or assignments from SWCG will be in writing to the committee Chairperson or via SWCG liaison to that committee. Committees may, in cooperation with SWCG, define projects or tasks to be addressed by the committee and make specific work assignments to committee members to complete.

Liaisons

Each committee will have a SWCG member(s) assigned to it to serve as a liaison between the committee and SWCG. The role of the liaison is to provide guidance and counsel to the committee from an SWCG perspective or to assist in clarifying policy and procedures, and to provide a direct conduit to SWCG for issues.

Roles and Expectations of Committees and Sub-Committees

- Committees are responsible for their own administration. They will select a chairperson and rotation, determine membership, maintain a charter that has been approved by SWCG, keep open communications with SWCG, take notes of meetings, and maintain records of actions taken by the committee.
- Committee Chair:
 - Provide leadership for meetings and tasks. This includes site selection, agenda preparation, facilitation, and notes. The meeting location, time, and proposed agenda will be shared with the SWCG committee liaison
 - Ensure the committee folders within SWCG are kept current with charter, membership, and current work.
 - Ensure that recommendations are presented to SWCG by a selected committee member or SWCG liaison
 - Attend one SWCG meeting annually and provide a brief update of issues to SWCG, and summarize the past year's activities of the committee. The SWCG liaison should ensure that these actions occur
- Members:
 - Research background information on assigned tasks, work collaboratively with other members of the committee so projects are completed to the highest standards and within assigned time frames
 - Serve as a conduit between the SWCG and agency field personnel to identify issues and develop guidance for resolution, and to provide a forum for technology transfer

Zone Coordinating Groups and Interagency Dispatch Centers

Zone Coordinating Groups

The Southwest Area is divided into nine Fire Management Zones. These Zones typically fall in line with one or more Dispatch Center boundaries. Zone Coordinating Groups (ZCG) have overall responsibility of coordinating fire management activities of the agencies represented in a Zone. The ZCG is comprised of representatives from cooperating federal, tribal, and state agencies that are physically located within that Zone. The ZCG operates under an AOP with delegation from Agency Administrator(s) from the respective agencies. ZCGs will coordinate fire restrictions activities and Type 3 IMT advertisement and availability as applicable. The ZCG chairperson will participate in SWCG/MAC group meetings as requested.

SWCC/Interagency Dispatch Centers

The SWCC and Interagency Dispatch Centers provide service to all wildland fire management agencies within the SW Area for both wildland fire and all-risk incidents. This is done through coordinating the movement of resources with the geographic area and through the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC). The SWCG provides overall oversight of the SWCC through a delegation of authority to the Center Manager. Zone Coordinating Groups provide oversight to the Interagency Dispatch Centers and a delegation to the respective Center Manager(s) within that Zone should also be in place. The SWCC and Interagency Dispatch Centers will follow all established procedures in the National and Southwest Mobilization Guides.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests

The SWCG has the responsibility of oversight of the Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) and the interagency employees within it. When a FOIA request is submitted through an Agency that requests information from the SWCC records and/or employees, the SWCG has established the following procedures:

- FOIA requests related to *dispatch or coordination center activities* will be coordinated by the FOIA Specialist from the primary managing agency for the computer (IT) records and hard copy logs of the pertinent dispatch or coordination center.
- The primary managing agency FOIA Specialist will fully coordinate with other pertinent agency FOIA Specialists in every case where the FOIA request involves an individual from another agency. This will be done prior to issuing the FOIA responses.
- Similar procedures should be duplicated by local Zone coordinating groups and respective Dispatch Centers.