



# National Wildfire Coordinating Group Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2009

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## **Preface**

*The Executive Board is proud of the continued hard work and dedication of the many employees who serve in the NWCG organization. It has been several years since NWCG issued an Annual Report. With such an active year of re-organization and important fire issues to resolve, the PMU has prepared this document to highlight the activities accomplished by NWCG during the 2009 fiscal year.*



## Executive Summary

Fiscal year 2009 was a year of big change for the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). However, the business to provide national leadership and establish, implement, maintain, and communicate policy, standards, guidelines and qualifications for wildland fire program management continued. The scope of NWCG is both national and interagency and supports the concept of seamless wildland fire management. This report reflects those activities in FY2009 that moved the NWCG organization closer to this shared concept.

The process to develop and staff the NWCG Program Management Unit (PMU) started early in the year with the hiring of new positions. The establishment of protocols and nurturing of relationships followed throughout the year as the organization evolved. The PMU worked hard to draft the *NWCG Operating Principles and Guidelines*, which provide guidelines to the NWCG organization. These guidelines provide the foundation for repeatable business practices shared by all NWCG groups to create predictable and consistent organizational behavior.

Initiation of the corporate university concept, clarifying the *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Policy* and refining the process for U.S. fire resources to be mobilized on international assignments all demonstrated forward thinking by NWCG in 2009. The creation of the Wildland Fire Investment Review Board (WFIRB) to review information technology (IT) investments will assist the field to bring forth ideas for IT innovations and will ensure a well-defined and disciplined process to select new and ongoing IT projects.



*The NWCG Executive Board and Program Management Office at the January 2009 All Chairs Workshop.*

The newly chartered Budget Advisory Unit (BAU) works in collaboration with the PMU to maintain the fiscal accountability of the NWCG organization. Streamlined, consistent processes and direction such as these will result in a safer and more effective wildland fire program.



## NWCG - Background

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) was formed in January 1976 to expand operational cooperation and coordination of wildland fire agencies within the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, and the National Association of State Foresters. The U.S. Fire Administration joined in 1993 and Intertribal Timber Council joined in 1999. The current NWCG Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Charter were signed October 11, 2007.

The NWCG provides national leadership and establishes, implements, maintains and communicates policy, standards, guidelines, and qualifications for wildland fire program management and supports the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

The NWCG Executive Board primary (voting) membership is limited to the signatory agencies specified in the 2007 MOU and amendments. See Appendix A for the FY 2009 Executive Board members. In 2009, the primary membership consisted of one individual representative from each of the following member organizations:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service
- U.S. Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management
- U.S. Forest Service Fire Systems Research
- U.S. Fire Administration
- National Association of State Foresters
- Intertribal Timber Council

In May 2009, the Australia/New Zealand Forest Fire Management Group was reaffirmed as an associate (non-voting) member organization.

The NWCG serves as a forum where short- and long-term issues involving national wildland fire management standards and program implementation can be coordinated, discussed, and resolved. It serves as a clearinghouse and initiates actions to improve coordination and integration of state, tribal, and federal wildland fire programs while recognizing individual agency missions.

The work of NWCG is critical to safe operations in the interagency wildland fire environment. Past work of NWCG has resulted in many efficiencies, establishment of standards and equipment to improve firefighter safety, and cost savings through interagency cooperation. Despite the situation of decreasing budgets and diminishing workforce, the demands for better accountability, faster and more accurate information,



and more efficient fire operations are increasing, thus making the work of NWCG increasingly important.

### National Wildland Fire Enterprise Architecture (NWFEA)

The NWFEA Blueprint was completed in January of 2008, and accepted by the Fire Executive Committee in July of 2008. The NWFEA Blueprint is an architectural effort which provides a means for increasing efficiency and eliminating redundancy. This document formed the basis for the current reorganization of the NWCG.

The NWFEA Blueprint contains recommendations for improvements toward a high-level, wildland fire enterprise, with fundamentally common strategic and business-level management processes. Findings and associated recommendations contained within the blueprint have been prioritized and many of them have been completed. Completion of other high-priority recommendations is ongoing.

In January of 2009, in a series of working sessions, the NWFEA wildland fire business function model was presented to subject matter experts representing each business area of the NWCG. These knowledgeable specialists provided valuable insight toward validating and enhancing this important model. Stewardship and stakeholder relationships to the functional areas depicted on the model were defined and documented. The rich information set contained in this NWFEA model continues to serve as a leveragable resource for enhancing the business processes of wildland fire. See Figure 1 for detailed schematic of the NWCG governance structure.

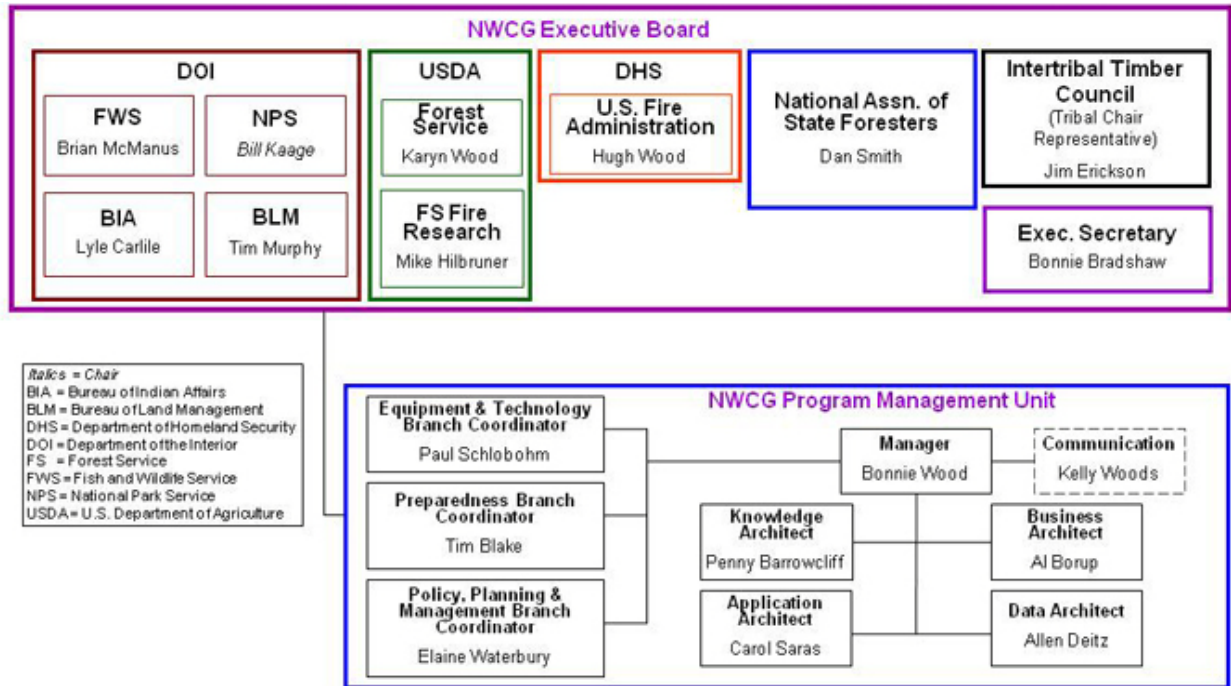


Figure 1: NWCG governance structure, January 2010.



## Wildland Fire Accomplishments

There were 23 decision memoranda issued in 2009 by the NWCG Executive Board. These decisions spanned the full suite of the NWCG's responsibilities. The decisions included changes in the firefighter medical standards programs of the agencies, the inception of an international deployment strategy, the development of a business case for a NWCG Corporate University, and preparation of the *NWCG Operating Principles and Guidelines, PMS 900*, to name only a few. A complete summary of all the 2009 Decision Memos can be found in Appendix B.

Routine business such as providing updated guidance for agreements with local fire departments and interagency large fire cost reviews, notification of personnel changes in the Program Management Unit, revisions to the Annual Operating Plans for the Master Cooperative Fire and

Stafford Act Agreements, and updates to the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy was also accomplished.



*A wildland firefighter conducts a burnout operation on the fireline during a night shift.*

## Corporate University

The NWCG Executive Board initiated the exploration of a corporate university concept for wildland fire and aviation training, and workforce development. By definition, a corporate university is the process by which an organization integrates strategic, results-driven and lifelong learning throughout its entire workforce. The goal is to better serve the wildland fire community as a whole by providing qualified, well-trained employees to meet the needs and goals of the wildland fire organizations in a timely manner.

In 2009, a Corporate University Business Case was completed that highlighted three primary internal drivers:

- A shrinking talent pipeline influenced by anticipated and pending retirements and pace at which qualifications are met
- Changes in the fire environment and their influence on fuels management, budgetary processes, and smoke management
- Changing workforce demographics with new learner profiles

In 2010, development of a NWCG Corporate University will continue with the creation of business and launch plans for a wildland fire and aviation corporate university. The



business plan will describe *what* the NWCG Corporate University would look like, and the launch plan will detail the *how*, *when*, and *where* for the corporate university.

## International Deployment

In 2008 and 2009, the United States and Australia and New Zealand utilized the NWCG and the Australia-New Zealand Forest Fire Management Group to initiate the first leadership exchange of wildfire/bushfire managers between the nations. The international exchange program offers fire managers from all three countries the opportunity to learn different approaches to natural resource management in the disciplines of fire, forestry and rangeland management.

The leadership exchange with Australia and the deployment of 73 fire resources to Australia in February 2009 was coordinated so well that the U.S. Ambassador to Australia and the Premier of



*This interagency BAER team was one of two from the U.S. to provide support to Australia during 2009.*



*The Prime Minister of Australia honors a group of U.S. firefighters in Washington D.C. along with the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to thank them for their assistance with the Australian fires as well as their participating in the leadership exchange program.*

Victoria sent a letter to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior requesting consideration of a full-time wildland fire position to be located in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

In addition to the resources sent to Australia, nearly 50 U.S. firefighters were sent to Canada to assist in fire management operations. As a result of the requests for international support, the NWCG developed a formalized process for future international deployment of resources for use in 2010. An application was created to solicit interest and availability from the federal firefighting community based on historical skill sets and qualifications requested for past deployments.



## All Hazard Organization

NWCG has recognized the opportunity to use resources from the all hazard community to support wildland fire incidents and increase all hazard response capabilities and proficiency. NWCG established an oversight team to address issues related to all hazard incident management teams. A pilot program will be conducted in 2010 to develop recommendations on potential integration of all hazard resources in support of wildland fire incidents. This pilot program will enable the wildland fire and all hazard communities to more effectively work together to enhance overall national response capabilities.

## Interagency Fire Program Management (IFPM)

On September 29, 2008, NWCG completed a mid-course analysis of all IFPM positions. The analysis focused on whether all of the original 14 key positions should be retained and if so, whether the original NWCG incident management qualifications are still appropriate for these positions. The results of this analysis led to the following decisions:

- The deadline to meet IFPM requirements was extended to October 1, 2010. This provides incumbents an additional year to meet “position specific IFPM Standards” (NWCG qualifications and additional required training) and positive education requirements for GS-0401 positions.
- Prevention and mitigation positions were removed as IFPM positions.
- National Fire Program Manager (NFPM) and Geographic Area Fire Program Manager (GFPM) positions will be filled with qualified individuals from senior leadership positions at the respective national and geographic levels.
- Adjustments to NWCG incident management qualifications and “Additional Required Training” standards. Many qualification requirements were moderated. Changes were made to seven positions.
- Clarification of which Command and General Staff positions meet the IFPM requirement for National and Geographic Area Fire Program Managers: There are seven Command and General Staff positions which meet the requirement.



*Helitack loads gear and a crew for transport to the fireline.*



## 2009 Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy

The *Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* was nationally released in February 2009, providing for consistent implementation of the 1995 and 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The guidance replaced the *Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* (June 20, 2003). This update consolidates and clarifies changes that have occurred since the 2003 strategy document was issued, and provides revised direction for consistent implementation of the Federal Fire Policy.

NWCG has tasked the Fire Policy Committee, with support from other key NWCG committee chairs, to develop direction on terminology use. This direction will help alleviate confusion in the field, with the public, and with cooperating state and local agencies on what terminology is acceptable to replace the obsolete terminology. This Task will be completed in 2010.

## Medical Standards Program (MSP)

The Interagency Medical Standards Program (IMSP) underwent a significant restructuring in 2009. As a result, the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service will manage their individual MSP programs.

NWCG firmly believes that the new programs will better serve their customers. Given the fact that the programs are now separate and more agency-specific, further guidance on these programs will be forthcoming from individual agencies rather than through NWCG.

*A helicopter carries a helitorch over an area to be ignited during a firing operation.*





### Standing Up the “New” Organization

Precipitating the NWCG reorganization effort was the integration of the National Fire and Aviation Executive Board (NFAEB) into the NWCG organization. The NWCG Executive Board saw opportunities with the integration to further implement changes to create efficiencies and to provide better service to the wildland fire community. Toward the end of 2008 a new organizational model for the “new” NWCG was developed. Implementation of this new organizational model began in earnest at the start of 2009. Under this new, larger-scoped group old working groups were decommissioned, functional areas were merged, and 14 new committees were defined. These committees were organized into three separate groups titled Branches. Three full-time, interagency NWCG positions were created to serve as coordinators for these branches. See Figure 2 for NWCG Structure Chart.

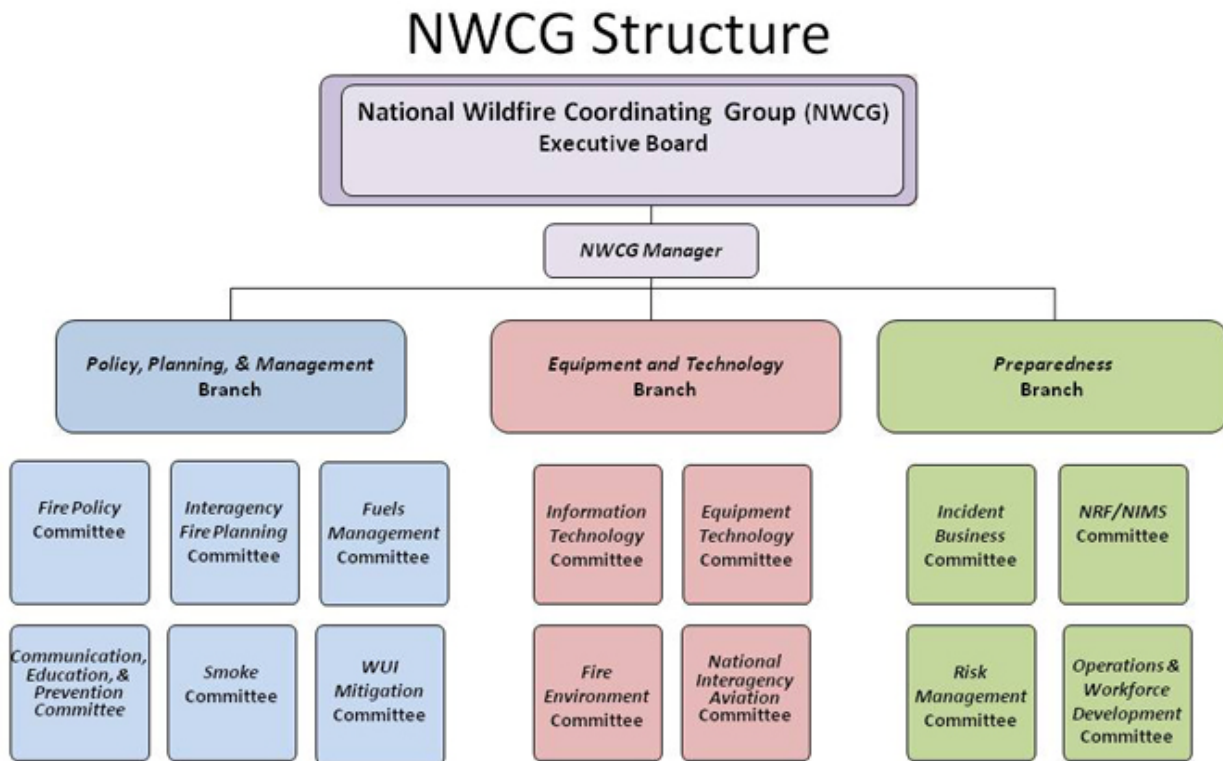


Figure 2: NWCG Structure.

The branch coordinators play a vital role in the coordination and management of this developing organization. The branch coordinators serve as liaisons between the Executive Board and the subgroups in their respective branches. The new NWCG structure reduced the span-of-control for the Executive Board members to one Executive Board member serving as a liaison and point-of-contact to a single branch coordinator. The role of the NWCG Manager was refined to reflect the expanded NWCG organization. With the new organization, previous issues with span-of-control, consistency, cooperation, coordination, and governance of subgroups will be reduced or eliminated.



During the 2009 fiscal year, ten of the fourteen committees were formally chartered, membership rosters were filled, and they began to operate under their new charters. Some committees partitioned their stewardship responsibilities into discrete areas and chartered subcommittees to handle specific business areas under the committees' stewardship. Three such subcommittees were chartered in 2009.

The review of information technology (IT) investments changed in 2009. The investment review process coordinates an IT investment from the beginning (an idea) to the end (retirement) of the lifecycle of an IT asset. The Wildland Fire Investment Review Board (WFIRB), formed in 2009, is an integral part of the NWCG IT investment review process. The WFIRB is comprised of the members of the NWCG Executive Board. With input provided by the PMU, the Information Technology Committee, and business subject matter experts, their responsibility is to ensure wildland fire IT investments meet the objectives and recommendations of the NWCG Strategic Plan and the NWFEA Blueprint. The WFIRB is also responsible to review the current investment portfolio to ensure program objectives are met.



*Members of NWCG participate in the All Chairs Workshop in January 2009.*

### **Program Management Unit**

The former NWCG Program Management Office (PMO) reorganized to meet the changing needs of the wildland fire community and to enhance support to the NWCG organization. In January 2009, the branch coordinator positions were filled with the hiring of three permanent staff members. The Program Manager and Chief Architect positions were combined, re-designed and renamed to the NWCG Program Manager. An NWCG Manager was hired in June 2009. See Appendix A for details on the PMU organization.

The PMO was renamed the Program Management Unit (PMU) to align with the naming conventions used in the restructured NWCG organization.

In addition to the PMU, various other agency positions support NWCG on a part-time or full-time basis, including a webmaster, a technical publications editor, and the NWCG training development group.



## Budget Advisory Unit

The Budget Advisory Unit (BAU) was chartered by the NWCG Executive Board in August 2008 with agency budget representatives from the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service. See Appendix A for a list of the agency representatives.

In FY2009, the BAU:

- Assisted in the formulation and allocation of the NWCG budget,
- Provided for accountability for the funding allocated to NWCG groups,
- Provided NWCG budget analyst expertise, and
- Helped ensure dates for budget timelines were met.

## NWCG Operating Principles and Guidelines

During 2009, the Program Management Unit drafted the *NWCG Operating Principles and Guidelines* to replace the “Bylaws and Operating Principles” document that had previously guided the operations of the NWCG organization.

The *NWCG Operating Principles and Guidelines* will provide general, consistent, and uniform guidance to the entire NWCG organization for use in conducting its business.

The initial version of the *NWCG Operating Principles and Guidelines* will be released in early FY2010. This product will be revised annually, with a new version released at the beginning of each fiscal year. Annual revisions will incorporate policy changes made during the previous year, as well as additional guidance or clarifications developed over the previous year.

During FY2010 and possibly FY2011, quarterly revisions are also anticipated. These quarterly revisions will be needed to keep pace with the dynamic nature of the guidelines as content is developed to fill out missing or skeletal sections of the initial version.



## Appendix A: NWCG Organization

### NWCG Executive Board Membership

#### Primary (voting) members

Organization	FY 2009 Representative
Bureau of Indian Affairs	Lyle Carlile
Bureau of Land Management	Tim Murphy
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Brian McManus (Chair)
National Park Service	William (Bill) Kaage (Beginning April 2009) Tom Nichols (Through March 2009)
U.S. Forest Service, Fire and Aviation Management	Karyn Wood
U.S. Forest Service, Fire Systems Research	Mike Hilbruner (Tom Zimmerman, alternate)
U.S. Fire Administration	Hugh Wood (Aitor Bidaburu, alternate)
National Association of State Foresters	Dan Smith (Vice-Chair)
Intertribal Timber Council	Jim Erickson
<i>Executive Secretary (non-voting)</i>	<i>Bonnie Bradshaw</i>

#### Associate (non-voting) members

Organization	FY 2009 Representative
Australia/New Zealand Forest Fire Management Group	Ewan Waller (Beginning May 2009)

#### Budget Advisory Unit

Organization	FY 2009 Representative
Bureau of Land Management	Denise Schmitz (Chair)
Forest Service	Cheryl Molis
National Park Service	Jeff Scott
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Sarah Fisher
Bureau of Indian Affairs	Maggie Moran



### Program Management Unit

Position	FY 2009 Staff Member
NWCG Manager	Bonnie Wood (Beginning July 2009) Shari Shetler, acting (February–June 2009) Judy Crosby (Through January 2009)
Equipment and Technology Branch	Paul Schlobohm, (Beginning January 2009) interim (March 2008-January 2009)
Policy, Planning and Management Branch Coordinator	Elaine Waterbury (Beginning February 2009) Lou Ballard, interim (March 2008-January 2009)
Preparedness Branch Coordinator	Tim Blake (Beginning January 2009) Al Borup, interim (March 2008–December 2008)
Knowledge Architect	Penny Barrowcliff
Business Architect	Al Borup
Data Architect	Allen Deitz
Application Architect	Carol Saras

### Branch Organization

Branch	Chair
<b>Equipment and Technology Branch</b>	
Equipment Technology Committee	Tory Henderson
Information Technology Committee	Shari Shetler
Fire Environment Committee	Kelly Martin (Beginning May 2009) Roshelle Pederson (Thru April 2009)
National Interagency Aviation Committee	Susie Bates (Beginning June 2009) Neal Hitchcock (Thru May 2009)
<b>Policy, Planning and Management Branch</b>	
Communication, Education and Prevention Committee	John Owens (Beginning March 2009) Roberta D'Amico (Thru February 2009)
Fire Policy Committee	Dick Bahr (Beginning July 2009) Vacant (Thru June 2009)
Fuels Management Committee	Eric Christiansen
Interagency Fire Planning Committee	Becky Brooks (Beginning May 2009) Linda Mazzu (Thru April 2009)
Smoke Committee	Pete Lahm
WUI Mitigation Committee	Will May
<b>Preparedness Branch</b>	
Incident Business Committee	Sarah Fisher (Beginning May 2009) Kathy Shelton (Thru April 2009)
National Response Framework/National Incident Management System Committee	Gordy Sachs (Beginning June 2009) Steve Gage (Thru May 2009)
Operations and Workforce Development Committee	Rosey Thomas
Risk Management Committee	Michelle Ryerson



## Appendix B: NWCG Memoranda for FY2009

<b>Memorandum Number</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Subject</b>
NWCG#001-2009	01/07/09	NWCG Executive Board	Update on the Modifications to the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy
NWCG#002-2009	01/09/09	NWCG Executive Board, NWCG Staff, and NWCG Subgroups	Notification of Selection of NWCG Branch Coordinators
NWCG#003-2009	02/05/09	NWCG Executive Board, NWCG Subgroups, and GACG Chairs	Interagency Large Fire Cost Reviews - Process and Guidance
NWCG#004-2009	02/06/09	NWCG Executive Board	Agreements with Local Fire Departments
NWCG#005-2009	02/13/09	Federal Fire and Aviation Safety Team (FFAST) and Interagency Medical Standards Program Office (IMSP)	Change in Oversight of Interagency Medical Standards Program Office
NWCG#006-2009	03/03/09	Fire Executive Council (FEC)	NWCG Recommendation for Information Systems Interconnection MOU
NWCG#007-2009	03/06/09	NWCG Executive Board	Health Screen Appointments in the Interagency Medical Standards Program Suspended after 3/13/09
NWCG#008-2009	03/11/09	NWCG Executive Board	Medical Standards Program Transition Plan
NWCG#009-2009	04/13/09	NWCG Executive Board	Revisions to the Annual Operating Plans for Master Cooperative Fire and Stafford Act Agreements due to Implementation of Revised Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy
NWCG#010-2009	04/16/09	NWCG Committees, Branch Coordinators, and Wildland Fire Training Personnel	Corporate University Business Case Information Collection Teleconferences
NWCG#011-2009	04/16/09	Interagency Wildland Fire Management Personnel	Interagency Fire Management Plan Template



Memorandum Number	Date	To	Subject
NWCG#012-2009	04/24/09	Agency Human Resource/ Human Capital Management Officers	Standardization of Geographic Area Coordination Center Job Series and Position Descriptions
NWCG#013-2009	05/26/09	NWCG Executive Board and GACG Chairs	Old Style Fire Shelter Disposal
NWCG#014-2009	05/26/09	NWCG Executive Board and GACG Chairs	Field Level Offices to Support the Statusing of AD Resources for Interagency National Response
NWCG#015-2009	06/04/09	NWCG Executive Board	Adjudication of Interagency Wildland Fire Medical Standards Program Pending Cases during Transition Period for Department of the Interior Employees
NWCG#016-2009	06/12/09	NWCG Executive Board, NWCG Staff, and Committee Chairs	New NWCG Manager
NWCG#017-2009	06/15/09	Agency Managers and Geographic Area Coordination Centers	Release of June 2009 Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide (PMS 310-1) and Amended Position Task Books
NWCG#018-2009	06/15/09	NWCG Executive Board and Geographic Area Coordination Centers	Interagency Safety and Health Reporting Processes
NWCG#019-2009	06/17/09	NWCG Committee Chairs, NWCG Sponsored Project and Program Leads, and NWCG Staff	NWCG FY2010 Budget Requests
NWCG#020-2009	06/24/09	NWCG Executive Board	Interim Influenza Guidelines for Wildland Fire Responses
NWCG#021-2009	09/02/09	NWCG Executive Board	Interagency Medical Standards Program Agency Separation
NWCG#022-2009	10/23/09	NWCG Executive Board and NWCG Subgroups	Initial Release of PMS 900 - NWCG Operating Principles and Guidelines
NWCG#023-2009	11/13/09	20 Different Agency SMEs	Interagency Wildland Fire Geospatial Governance