



NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

National Interagency Fire Center
3833 S. Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705

MEMORANDUM

Reference: NWCG#038-2010

To: NWCG Committee Chairs
Geographic Area Coordinating Group (GACG) Chairs
National IC/AC Council Chair

From: NWCG Chair *William Raage*

Date: August 13, 2010

Subject: Current Status on Incident Management Team (IMT) Succession Planning Project

The fire management community is facing a number of challenges with the current model for maintaining and developing National Type 1 and Type 2 incident management teams. The original concept for the Incident Team Management Program was designed more than 25 years ago and has only been revisited once since then. (Reference: *An Agency Strategy for Fire Management*, A Report from the National Management Review Team, January 12, 2000 released by the USDA Forest Service)

Since the inception of IMT's, we have seen changes in our agency organizations, as well as in the natural environment. Fire seasons and fire events are longer, both due to environmental changes and full implementation of the Federal Fire Policy. Changing environmental conditions include climatic patterns, drought, and fuel conditions. Such changes have caused wildland fire and the management support needed for coordinated response to occur 12 months a year in many areas of the country. One study examining fire in the Northern Rockies found the average fire season in the region had increased annually by 78 days in the past 20 years.

On the internal front, we face a number of workforce and demographic issues that have also affected IMT participation. These include societal factors influencing the incoming workforce pool, public expectations of wildland fire managers, and fire management's increasing involvement in emergency response. Other challenges include the increasing number of firefighter retirements and the dynamics of a younger workforce. The number of IMT's is down. As an example, we lost one (1) Type-1 Team in California this year due to shortages of

California based Type 1 Incident Commanders. There is clearly a succession problem when we are not able to fully staff teams.

The loss of incident management leadership skills may not be remedied in the near future. The Advanced Incident Management (S-520) and Area Command (S-620) courses have reached such a shortfall in student participation that the sessions have been cancelled for 2011. The 2010 session required the use of fully qualified personnel to fill teams since trainees were not available in critical positions. Only one (1) Incident Commander Trainee was in the 2010 session.

The need to improve succession planning specific to firefighting positions was also identified in the Office of Inspector General Audit on the Forest Service Firefighting Succession Planning Process. Amongst the interagency wildland firefighting community, the Forest Service is not unique in the need to enhance succession planning efforts.

In response to declining IMT participation and preparatory training, NWCG identified a group of interagency fire managers and agency administrators to conduct an analysis of contributing factors and develop alternatives for future and ongoing staffing and leadership of IMT's. On January 15, 2010, NWCG issued a memorandum (NWCG #002-2010), which spelled out the reasoning and need for the analysis. NWCG recognized:

- The need to update the current business model to address incident management needs in the future. Any update to the current model would require a planned implementation and transition process and would be expected to be phased in over a period of years.
- That the current workforce management and succession planning for wildfire response is not sustainable for the future.
- That the increasing fire season length requires staff to respond to fire events for longer periods of time, which results in less on-site time for staff to accomplish normal job duties and, consequently, hampers the ability for agencies to accomplish their core mission.
- The need to review and analyze alternatives addressing the appropriate number, type, and configuration of the national IMTs (Type 1, Type 2, and Area Command).
- That the capabilities of state teams should be a part of the analysis.

Subsequently, on March 5, 2010, NWCG issued Tasking Memorandum TM-2010-02, which established the National IMT Succession Planning Project Team Lead, Project Team, and Task Team Leads. These teams have been addressing this issue since April, 2010.

The Project Team has been reviewing historical and foundational documents and studies to understand lessons from the past, while looking toward options for the future. Portions of these key documents have resulted in positive change all ready. Some of the key documents that have helped to shape the past ten (10) years of fire management include:

- Agency Strategy for Large Fire Management Recommendations (2000)
- National Interagency Complex Incident Management Organization Study (2004)
- NIMO Feasibility and Implementation Plan (2005)

- Quadrennial Fire and Fuel Report (2006)
- Quadrennial Fire Review (2009).

This Fall, recommendations and proposed alternatives for action will be released for review and comment. All levels of our organization will be involved. Comments will be reviewed and early in the calendar year of 2011, the NWCG Executive Board expects to select the alternative that best meets the needs for the Interagency Incident Management Organization. At that time, the preferred alternative will be vetted with key stakeholders prior to final release and a phased-in implementation.

If you have any questions, please contact Lyle Carlile, NWCG Executive Board Liaison to the Project Team at Robert.Carlile@bia.gov or (208) 387-5697 or Bill Kaage, NWCG Executive Board Chair at (208) 387-5225.

cc: NWCG Executive Board