



Northern Rockies Fire Management Strategic Plan for the 2012 Fire Season

Introduction:

This Strategic Plan is tiered to the Federal Fire and Aviation Operations 2012 Action Plan and the NRCG MAC Operating Handbook for the Northern Rockies. Geographic Area emphasis will continue to be on Initial and Extended Attack incidents, Fire Leadership, and Appropriate Response. Close management oversight, leadership and decision making is required on all emerging fires. Communication and coordination between interagency partners throughout the year is key in managing incidents within the Northern Rockies.

The following documents are utilized in preparing this plan. They provide specific operational protocols and information for the Northern Rockies.

1. 2012 National Seasonal Wildland Fire Assessment (http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/2012_%20NSAW_WEST_REPORT.pdf)
2. Northern Rockies Coordination Center Annual Operating Plan
3. NRCG Decision Support Criteria Definitions (Appendix 1)
4. Northern Rockies MAC Operating Handbook (http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcg/Op_plans/MAC%20Plan_2011.pdf)
5. R1/R4 Aviation Management Plan (<http://gacc.nifc.gov/nrcc/dispatch/aviation/aviation.htm>)

Situation Assessment -- refer to the Northern Rockies Preliminary 2012 Seasonal Wildland Fire Assessment (http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/2012_%20NSAW_WEST_REPORT.pdf)

Bottom line: Expect **NORMAL** significant large fire activity from early to mid-July across the Northern Rockies region...especially for areas east of the Divide.

Normal snowpack followed by a dry spring had raised significant fire potential with several large pre-green up grass fires being observed. A shift in the weather around Memorial Day Weekend has produced nearly three weeks of relatively cool and wet weather. Large fire danger has been reduced to more normal spring time levels. All PSAs except PSA 10 and 12 are reporting above normal-normal fuel moisture contents and below normal-normal ERCs. PSA 10 and 12 are slightly more dry than normal.

Late July and August typically feature temperatures in the upper 80s and 90s along with very little precipitation. Latest outlooks for July, August, and September from the Climate Prediction Center imply that there are good chances that the core fire season months may be drier and warmer than normal (see Appendix 1). It must be noted that there is a great deal of uncertainty in this forecast due to the changing El Nino/ENSO neutral situation. Late August should feature the passage of a few dry cold fronts which could produce some problematic wind events should the fuels be receptive. Current thinking is that the heavy carryover fine fuels load will become available to burn by mid-July with all other classes becoming ready by end of July. Historical data for situations such as this suggest that a wet front should pass across the region during the third week of September bringing a gradual close to the fire season. Keep in mind that the fire potential could remain elevated on the grasslands until the snow falls.

Fuel Conditions:

Eastern Montana /North Dakota

- Fine fuels have passed peak greenup in most areas with very heavy carryover loading.
- Mountain pine beetle, Spruce budworm, and Douglas-fir bark beetle outbreak increasing and expecting to expand
- 1000-hour fuel moistures are near normal at 16-22%

Western Montana

- Peak greenup in progress. Grasses beginning to cure out around July 4..
- 1000-hour fuels 16-20% as of July 6.
- Mountain pine beetle, spruce budworm, and Douglas-fir bark beetle outbreak increasing and expecting to expand

North Idaho

- Mountain snowpack lingering in highest terrain about 7500 feet, further delaying greenup.
- Grasses at peak greenup at lower elevations. Should cure normally.
- 1000-hour fuels 18-22%
- Insect and disease related tree mortality increasing and expecting to expand

Historical Perspective

Historically the peak fire season in the Northern Rockies begins early to mid-July and runs thru mid-late September. Fire activity typically spreads from east to west and from lower elevations to higher elevations across the Geographic Area. The 2012 fire season should follow this pattern with grass fires starting in southeast Montana around mid-July.

Fall 2011 was a typical fall. Temperatures were near normal. Fall moisture was slightly below normal. This continued the 4 year trend of normal to above normal precipitation across the region. Live fuels had adequate time to absorb fall moisture before entering dormancy. Winter 2011-2012 was characterized by a La Nina event. All basins received normal to above normal snowfall. Temperatures were generally above normal with very little arctic activity noted. Eastern Montana and North Dakota were exceptionally dry and warm with very little snow fall recorded. A dry spring in 2012 allowed for a weak greenup along with normal melting of the mountain snowpack. A wet and cool period from late May through mid-June reset the large fire danger to more normal spring values. The current thinking is that below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation will persist in most areas until the end of June. After that, ENSO neutral conditions possibly transitioning to a weak El Nino may lead to a warm and dry July. There is still great uncertainty for August and September. Onset of El Nino neutral conditions could mean a warm and dry August. However, if El Nino builds rapidly, August could be relatively wet and cool with a series of wetting storms. Fire season 2012 should be busy with normal to above normal fire activity.

Resources and Preparedness

The Geographic Area expects to be at 95% of the fire fighter production capabilities of Initial Attack resources during the peak fire season. The Northern Rockies agencies will coordinate severity requests to add additional resources to meet severe conditions.

Safe and aggressive Initial Attack is the key for keeping burned acreage and resource losses to a minimum. Initial attack is a priority over large incidents within the Northern Rockies. Primary resources for successful Initial Attack include the following:

- Fully staffed engine and Initial Attack modules
- Type II and III Helicopters
- Smokejumpers – consider boosters during lightning events
- Large Air Tankers and Single-Engine Air Tankers (SEATS)

- Leadership (Type III, IV and V Incident Commanders)
- Type III Organizational capability planned in Zone Annual Operating Plans
- Type II IA and Type II Crews and Wildland Fire Modules
- Appropriate staffing at Dispatch Centers
- Appropriate staffing at National and Regional caches
- Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) platform available

These resources will be tracked closely and managed wisely for the best results. All interagency resources will be utilized to effectively respond to incidents and provide fire leadership. Resources will be shared between incidents and agencies. Resources need to be utilized effectively and efficiently on priority work. Northern Rockies Operations, with concurrence from Northern Rockies MAC will prioritize incidents and move resources between incidents.

Smokejumpers will be utilized for initial response (on any fires), emerging fires, implementing management actions on wildland fires, implementing specific actions on long duration wildfires, and to provide fire management leadership. These include 20 person crews and single resource assignments.

Type 1 crews will be utilized in all aspects of fire management needs as well. They may be utilized as IA modules, Fire use modules, and provide needed supervisory overhead positions as needed.

The Northern Rockies as part of National Mobilization needs to capitalize on opportunities to assist other Geographic Areas in their fire management and aviation needs. Most of the federal agencies are currently sharing resources with the southwest region as the fire seasons are at different times. This makes for efficient use of resources and provides good training and experiences for our fire personnel.

Priorities

All unplanned wildland fire ignitions require a response. This is guided by the strategies and objectives outlined in a units Land and Resource management plan that reflects land and resource values, management goals and objectives or agency regulation. Response is based on an evaluation of risks to firefighter and public safety, land and resource and fire management objectives, resource availability, the circumstances under which fire occurs, including weather and fuel conditions, protection priorities, values to be protected and cost effectiveness. A priority matrix will be utilized to document how incidents are prioritized in the Geographic Area.

Wildland Fire Priorities

When multiple IA and large fires are occurring and resources become scarce, prioritization becomes critical. Consider using the following priorities when allocating scarce equipment and personnel:

1. Firefighter and public safety
2. Initial Attack
3. Emerging Incidents (Type 3)
4. Community Protection
5. Critical Infrastructure (e.g., Utilities)
6. Threats to Other Structures and Improvements
7. Natural Resource Protection
8. BAER Project Support

The Geographical Area (GA) will utilize information from 209's and the decision support criteria definitions to prioritize incidents within the GA. Zone MACs will be encouraged to take an active role in managing resources and prioritizing incidents within their zone. Zone MACs will coordinate with the Geographical MAC or Northern Rockies Operations.

Contingency Planning

1. When resource shortages are acute and there is elevated potential for emerging incidents, (ie. anticipated dry lightning) a ready reserve will be identified from resources available in the Geographic Area. This

would include resources assigned to incidents. This ready reserve may consist of crews, aircraft, engines, and overhead positions including a Type 3 IC. These resources are not expected to be staged but utilized and identified on the Incident Action Plan in a manner that meets mobilization guidelines.

2. Northern Rockies Operations, with concurrence from NR MAC, will prioritize moving resources between incidents from lower to higher priority fires, ranging from single resources to incident management teams.
3. Northern Rockies Wildland Fire Management strategies will be utilized.
4. Resources will be shared between incidents across the Geographical area.

Geographic Draw Down

Resources will be coordinated and shared across the Geographical Area at all planning levels for incidents and projects. All zones will establish draw down plans for their zones and local unit needs. The Geographic draw down level for resources is an accumulation of the zone level plans. Resource levels will be coordinated with all the zones across the GA. This coordination will increase as the planning levels increase based on expected needs.

All Team resources managed by NRCG at Northern Rockies (NR) planning levels 1-3 will be available for out of area assignments. At NR planning levels 4, the GA will require 4 Type 2 Teams and 1 Wildland Fire Management Team to remain within the GA. At PL-5 all 5 Type 2 Teams and Wildland Fire Management Teams will be utilized within the GA.

Prescribed Fire/Wildland Fire Priorities

1. High priority for resource commitment will be given to prescribed fire use and wildland fire throughout the fire season.
2. At Preparedness Level 4 and 5, follow the established protocol in the National and Northern Rockies Mobilization Guide.

All Risk Priority

Agencies will be requested to respond to non-fire emergencies. On a case-by-case basis, this will have to be evaluated in accordance with State and Federal law.

1. National security
3. Protection of life
4. Protection of property
5. Protection of natural resources

Safety

1. Firefighter and public safety is our first priority and will not be compromised during the conduct of ground or air operations.
2. Assure that proper fire management leadership is available and that these individuals are receiving appropriate rest. Provide additional leadership as production resources are added to the Units.
3. Provide critical safety management oversight and leadership. (e.g., ground safety specialist, aviation safety specialist and/or Fire Safety Assistance Teams).
4. Provide a strong sense of situational awareness for the safety of firefighters on the fire ground.
5. Increase and maintain a high level of Fire Management and Agency Administrator oversight on Initial Attack and Extended Attack incidents.
6. During the fire season, a large number of fire transitions from Initial Attack to Extended Attack are possible. Assure that all Fire Managers and Agency Administrators are providing the necessary oversight during transition.
7. Work – Rest Guidelines haven't changed. Managers need to manage the Work – Rest Guidelines and not let the Work – Rest Guidelines manage them, especially in long term fire situations. Stagger days off and order replacements early.
8. Firefighters need to be able to operate radios between narrow and wide bands.
9. Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones (LCES) remain a pivotal element for firefighter safety, and we continue to promote and develop these fundamentals;

- Individual firefighters and line overhead must be able to relate LCES mitigations at all times while engaged in suppression and prescribed fire activities.
- Pilots and flight crews will assist in the establishment and evaluation of LCES mitigations on the ground.
- Line Officers must be fluent in quality LCES mitigations, and expect all firefighters to maintain quality LCES. Arranging field tours with experts to enhance their understanding of Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones is very desirable.
- Narrow/wide band training and radio use for fire personnel by all agencies.

Leadership

1. Activate the Geographic Area Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC): (1) When large fire management activities begin to compete for scarce resources and or (2) where the Geographic Area moves into Preparedness Level 4. Pursue representation from State emergency service agencies, local law enforcement and State Fire Chief's association to coordinate community protection issues.
2. When the NR MAC is activated, conduct an in-person Agency Administrator (Regional Forester, State Forester, BLM State Director, etc.) briefing and gain buyoff and confirmation from the administrators on the authorities of the MAC group and established priorities for large fires. Assure that Agency Administrators understand the Geographic incident prioritization and resource allocation process.
3. Request additional leadership and support to assure coverage and proper rest for Fire Managers, Aviation personnel and Agency Administrators.
4. Utilize Zone MAC Groups to coordinate activities and collaborate on fire management issues at a more local level. These MAC Groups can provide prioritization within their sub-geographic areas thereby assisting the Geographic MAC. Zone MAC's should be activated early.
5. Maintain open lines of communication and liaison between NR MAC, National Guard leaders, Fish and Wildlife Officials & Utilities Companies. Involve liaison to MAC groups as appropriate.
6. Require performance evaluations on all private fire service contractor resources. Submit a copy of the evaluations to NRCC.

Initial Attack/Operations

1. Initial Attack and Extended Attack will be the priority in the Northern Rockies. Develop and follow zone draw down plans that maintain Initial Attack capabilities and leadership at Preparedness Levels 3 thru 5. Replace Initial Attack resources committed to large incidents as quickly as possible.
2. Consider using Type 1 resources (i.e. Hotshot Crews, Smokejumpers) on Initial Attack and emerging Extended Attack fires. Coordinated closely with Northern Rockies Operations.
3. Implement trigger points for moving additional resources and management infrastructure into the Geographic Area before the resources within the Northern Rockies Area are over-committed. Pre-positioning of resources is a key to success.
4. At Preparedness Level 5 establish a Type 3 "ready-reserve" of resources from each zone that is capable of rapid deployment to an area with Initial Attack and Extended Attack needs. Teams assigned in zones will assist in identifying and managing IA resources.
5. Maximize the use of smokejumper resources assigned to the Area. Smokejumpers will be utilized in all aspects of fire management.
6. At Preparedness Level 4, units will be prepared to hire and train AD and EFF crews, local volunteer fire department personnel and private fire service contractors to meet local and, as appropriate, National needs.
7. When faced with multiple initial attack situations, prioritize operations into high value vs. lower value responses.

Aviation

1. Mobilize additional Single Engine Air Tanker Bases within the Geographic Area and move them according to need. Plan to staff each base with 2 SEAT aircraft and appropriate management and leadership.
2. Mobilize additional aviation resources for Initial Attack with severity funds as conditions worsen. In addition, aerial supervision and leadership should be increased as additional aviation assets are added.
3. Reserve flight time for initial attack.

4. Utilize Exclusive Use helicopters within the Geographic Area. Assure proper leadership provided with resources and utilization of resources between zones.
5. Preposition Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) platforms as needed.
6. Encourage early detection flights and increase flights at PL Levels 4 and 5.
7. Evaluate the use of MAFFS aircraft to supplement aviation resources at Great Falls, Helena, Billings and Spokane.
8. Evaluate 2-4 CL-215/415 for use at Coeur d'Alene, Helena, Lewistown and Kalispell as the season progresses.

Logistics and Mobilization

1. Develop staging and mobilization centers, as needed, to support fire activities.
2. Out-of-Area Type 1 and Type 2 Incident Management Teams may be staged in strategic locations. Staged teams will go to the top of the rotation and after 72 hours of staging the need for these teams will be reevaluated.
3. Provide for a comprehensive briefing for resources coming into the Northern Rockies from outside the Area.
4. Rotate out-of-Area resources and management infrastructure into the Northern Rockies to keep Area resources rested and fresh.
5. National and regional caches staffed and stocked at appropriate levels. Contingency plans in place for regional coverage in the event of multiple unrelated emergency response situations.

Planning and Coordination

1. Assign a Long Term Fire Behavior Analyst when the Incident Support Organization is working with MAC. Review the WFDSS and request incidents to update the WFDSS where there are insufficient resources to accomplish the selected alternative. LTAN's or other assistance will be made available to local units to assist with fire behavior predictions.
2. Assure management response as directed in agencies' fire management plan and land management plans.
3. Establish regular agency administrator/fire management conference calls. Recommend weekly at Preparedness Level 3 and 4, and daily at Preparedness Level 5, or when fire activity dictates.
4. At Preparedness Level 4 and 5, establish daily NRCG MAC conference calls that may include Zone-MAC, Area Command and Incident Commander.
5. Utilize long term assessments and management response in allocating resources across the GAC. Establish and utilize a fire behavior assessment group in predictive services.

Fire Prevention and Information

1. During the spring, utilize fire prevention personnel, media contacts, and interagency partners to stress fire prevention, awareness and wildland fire management response.
2. When multiple human-caused fires begin to occur, evaluate the need to mobilize Geographic and National Fire Prevention Teams to work with the public and local communities. Assure that there is strong communication between these teams, Agency Administrators, State and County authorities, and Incident Management Teams.
3. As activity increases, recommend assigning a media contact to the Incident Support Organization working with GMAC.
4. Address and coordinate fire restrictions and closure processes preseason. Establish a Geographical Restrictions Coordinator to work with the area interagency partners and state Governor Offices.
5. Coordinate the need for large scale closures, as appropriate.

Fire Business Management

1. Cost accountability will be evaluated on all incidents to provide safe, cost effective suppression of the incident.
2. Teams with finance expertise will be compiled by the geographical area to assist units which are short of financial resources. Units should not rely on ordering Incident Management Teams to make up for a lack of fire business capability but should make other plans to meet their fire business needs. Pre-identify Financial Support and Business Management modules to assist local units as needed.

3. Agency Administrators will provide financial over-site. They must maintain a daily dialog with Incident Management Teams and fire management officers during the decision-making process and give clear direction concerning containing suppression costs.
4. Follow NRCG budget guidelines and business practices.
5. A suppression cost objective will be included as an incident objective in the Delegation of Authority to Incident Commanders.
6. Cost-effective management of resources will be monitored at the geographic level and areas of concern will be brought to the attention of Agency Administrators.
7. Agency Administrators should utilize Incident Business Advisors (IBAs) as appropriate to assist with cost management. Assign an IBA for any fire projected suppression costs of >\$1 million.
8. Use of Contracting Officer Technical Representatives (COTRs) in the Northern Rockies to assist agency administrators and teams in the management of contract resources.
9. Agency Administrator will provide over-site for Cost Share Agreements to ensure a fair and equitable disbursement of costs.

Large Fire Cost Tickler List

- Assure Response to incidents commensurate with values at risk.
- Review Management Efficiencies.
- Fund preparedness resources to maintain an efficient Initial Attack organization.
- Prioritize suppression objectives. When resources are short, concentrate on protecting life and values at risk. De-emphasize perimeter control.
- Maintain a daily dialog between IMT, FMO and Agency Administrator.
- Manage a fire at appropriate complexity level.
- Staff the fire where the fire will threaten suppression objectives - guerrilla tactics.
- Manage the risk and resources by utilizing available incident decision support tools. Choose “the best ridge”, not “the next ridge”.
- Initial and Extended Attack is the key to large fire costs.
- Regional oversight of the WFDSS and team delegation. Are teams doomed to fail by being asked to accomplish objectives that are unobtainable or unrealistic?
- Consider the best tools for the job. Equipment, use, water handling and night operations.
- Better predictive services tools – when is the season going to end? Will help us in our risk assessment.
- Quickly demob ineffective contract resources accomplished through the dispatching of COTR’s to assist the IMT.
- Better manage aviation resources. Use on Initial Attack and Extended Attack fires. Minimize use on large and mega fires. Demob if not needed.
- Consider cost when prioritizing the release of resources.
- Minimize the use of motels and other travel costs when mobilizing resources.
- Use more spike camps to reduce travel and aviation time.
- Minimize the holding of resources on incidents for “what if?” situations.
- Complete Unit Fire Management Plans.
- Evaluate the need for expensive equipment and support on incidents. Release these resources.
- Better manage supply requests.
- Better manage re-supply requests (See supplement to Chapter 30).
- Better educate line personnel on the use of available equipment (forwarders, skidders, excavators, skidgines, dozers, clippers, masticators, etc.).
- Monitor use of specialized equipment, demobilization or remove from pay status when not needed.
- Limit the amount of equipment in staging; take some risk.
- Question name requests when local resources are available.
- Discussion with AA to supply home unit resources.
- Increase intermediate supervision (strike team/ task force leaders).

- Improve coordination and management of resources on multi-team incidents to prevent hoarding of resources.
- Consider the extension of personnel assigned to 21 days when fatigue can be managed and costs will be lowered.
- Teams and Dispatch manage the use/need of rental vehicles.
- Agency cell phones (provide by home unit) and personal cell phone costs should not be reimbursed, exceptions may apply but must be document and approved by the Incident Agency Administrator.
- Work with municipalities in developing/establishing fuel breaks.
- Monitor suppression resources on large fires to assess degree to which they are productively engaged. Minimize number of resources held in reserve not being engaged.
- Define criteria during which suppression responses would occur (time of year; expected weather changes).
- Maintain liaison with National MAC as situation warrants.
- Maintain liaison with Regional HLS/FEMA as situation warrants.

The Northern Rockies Coordinating Group is committed to work together to provide leadership and support throughout the Northern Rockies for all agencies. Safety of our fire personnel in managing incidents is the highest priority.



APPENDIX 1

NRCG DECISION SUPPORT CRITERIA DEFINITIONS for the next 24 hour period

GOAL LEVEL: **Incident/Resource Prioritization**

LEVEL 2:

Values at Risk

- What consequences (values) are affected by not taking action?
- Mitigation measures should be considered in the analysis of the Level 3 elements.
- Structural Fire Department Jurisdiction?

Probability of Success

- What's the potential for our management action to be successful?

Success is defined as

- achieving objectives for planned actions.

LEVEL 3:

Communities

The threat that a fire will potentially enter any legally defined city or town.

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Infrastructure

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy municipal watersheds, power lines, bridges, etc

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Commercial

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy businesses (this can include commercially important timber and range values).

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Historic and Cultural Resource

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy significant historic or cultural resources.

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Principal Residence

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy year-round homes.
Mitigation measures should be considered in the analysis.

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Non-principal Residence

The threat that a fire will potentially destroy seasonal homes, cabins, outbuildings, barns, etc.

- High: There is direct and immediate threat (within 24 hours) to the priority in question from the incident due to location, uncontrolled line, or highly erratic fire behavior.
- Moderate: There is a potential threat (within 48 hours) to the priority in question from the incident.
- Low: There is low (40% or less) threat to the priority in question from the incident.

Natural Resources

The threat that a fire will potentially adversely impact forest and grasslands, wildlife, non-municipal watershed, viewsheds, etc.

- High: There is a potential (80% or greater) of significant unacceptable resource damage.
- Moderate: There is a moderate potential (40% or greater) of several resource values being unacceptably impacted.
- Low: The impacts to the resource are within acceptable limits.

Meeting Incident Objectives

Probability of meeting incident/MAP objectives in a given fuel type:
Effectiveness of resources. Fuel type used as a guide.

- Low (Fuel Models 8-13)
- Moderate (Fuel Model 4-7)
- High (Fuel Models 1-3)

Expected Fire Behavior

Fire behavior expected in next 24 hours.

- Low
- Low to moderate
- Moderate to active
- Active to very active
- Very active to extreme

Resource Availability

Resource needs can be met within timeframes required.

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

ALTERNATIVES: (Fire Name (Dispatch Center, State-Agency))