



Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes September 21st, 2023

Meeting Venue: Zoom

- I. Attendance**
 - a. Quorum met see attached for meeting attendance.
- II. Call to Order**
 - a. Committee chair Allen Lebovitz called meeting to order 1:02 pm September 21st, 2023.
- III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business**
 - a. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to review and approve minutes from August 17th, 2023. Wade Pierce motions to approve both minutes, Cody Rohrbach seconds. All members vote yeah and there are no abstains.
 - b. No outstanding business discussed.
- IV. Agency Updates**
 - a. **State Mobilization Update** – Melissa Gannie, Assistant State Fire Marshall. We’ve had 28 mobilizations this year, mob costs over \$20 million, appropriation for biennium is \$8 million. We stationed strike teams in Kittitas and Klickitat Counties, strike teams engaged in initial attack in Yakima and then diverted over to the fires in Spokane. Our report to the Legislature is that the prepositioning tool is a good resource especially if we know there is going to be a weather event. We met with Spokane 3 & 4 and County fire marshal’s office, talking about recovery for those areas and how the WIU code affects the jurisdictions and homeowners in those areas. A Public Assistance grant was not opened as the damage to infrastructure was not enough to meet the threshold. Could be challenges on the recovery after those fires. Had Kittitas County department chief Elliot talk about how they are enforcing the WUI code in their county, as well as Seattle Fire Department’s code analyst, policy manager and building official. Need guidance from DNR on the reliability of the map and related RCWs. The Legislature has adopted specific language and provisions rather than using a model code to build off of, like building code. Asking for someone from DNR to address the group. We are working with fire service on community risk reduction. We are not going to emergency response ourselves out of these situations, we have to get ahead.
 - i. Russ Lane – George and I have talked about WUI mapping and its original intent. We can spend some time with Melissa. From the genesis was not mentioned to be something specific, parcel by parcel with code attached to it, but as a hazard map with less specificity.
 - ii. Wade Pierce – Want to make aware of the unintended consequences a map like this can have. Have experience with insurance companies not providing coverage based on the map. Insurers are using the map to deny coverage.



- iii. Loren Torgerson – Is the current WUI map the issue? A: Yes, either because the RCW didn't say "DNR this is what you have to do with it. Or once you publish that the Authority Having Jurisdictions can rebut." AHJs are reluctant to deviate from the map from the liability.
 - iv. Tony Craven – I know we talked to the Insurance Commission in the past. The insurance companies have maps that show high risk, regardless of on the ground mitigation efforts.
 - v. Chris Martin – Map is only one issue on this topic. There needs to be a task force from the Insurance Commissioner's Office, the Fire Marshall's Office, DNR, the AG's Office, and a good private sector insurance lawyer. Need to get everyone to the table together to solve this.
 - vi. Carlene Anders – In the disaster world we have been dealing with this for quite a bit, we have a list of companies that we have worked with and we have a lot of resources around it.
- b. **Federal Update** – Kari Grover-Wier, Central Washington Initiative Lead of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Still have active fires throughout the region, had to do a couple closures over the last week, but should be lifting soon. Had great meeting with DNR on the Central Washington Initiative, looking at a 10 year plan of projects. Doing this work and coordination on the wildfire side and the adjacent coordination on the wildfire risk reduction side is key to us working together on large incidents. When teams come to a fire we have all the groundwork done to make those coordination's successful.
- c. **Fire Service Update** – Leonard Johnson, Fire Chief Thurston Co. Fire District 9. Primary focus is preparing for Commerce's hearing on fire service delivery, report has to be done by December. That focus for us is on how the fire mob plan works and how it interacts with wildfire emergency management. Last month was very busy, finally slowing down now.

Cody Rohrbach, Fire Chief Spokane Co. Fire District 3. August 18th in Spokane County was our big fire event, there is opportunity to leverage the lessons learned from these events and move forward. Talk of a FLA meeting. Hopefully will have a shareable product. Dry cold event reduced humidity and brought winds that caused extremely quick fire movement, Gray for example ran 7 miles in first 14 hrs. 326 structures lost, 240 were primary residences, 1 fatality. Could have been much worse. Credit to all the cooperators and stakeholders. Utilized new technology to communicate with the public along with old fashioned boots on the ground. Community always supports the secondary egress and evac routes but never on their property, always somewhere else. Gray and Oregon individually trump firestorm let alone collectively. These events are becoming common. Community is continuing to grow and no sign of stopping.

- i. Wade Pierce – We can't forget personal responsibility, reckless behavior that can cause fires needs to be addressed.



- ii. Carlene Anders – Want people to understand that the public assistance from FEMA did not hit the threshold, partly because of how well they did Firewising there. The minimum threshold was 13.6 million, and it only hit 6.2 million. There probably won't be IA or PA assistance. The new State program is going to backfill and support recovery on this.

- d. **Wildland Fire Management Division** – Russ Lane, Wildland Fire Management Division Manager. We had 1,057 fires, a 10 year low, 108,000 acres burned, and another low. The events in Spokane highlight that even the low still can have significant consequences. Lessons learned and sharing them will be important, we've got Chief Neckels at District 4, Pat Ryan, and Cody Rohrbach talking about it. Our meteorological section did a great analysis of the event. Spokane fire would have been national news had it not been for the Lahaina fire. My counterpart from Hawaii will be meeting with me in the future, he will be staying a week to have in depth discussions, may invite them to the NW Compact. We are hosting a CIM course next month in Vancouver, 48 students out of 85 applicants, we have significant demand to meet. We were able to prioritize Washington personnel. We have the licensing for a Smokey bear license plate for Washington. We completed the licensing agreement, working on design options, and legislative actions to get this across the finish line and generate funds for firefighting across Washington.

- e. **WA State Forester Update** – George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor, Wildland Fire Management Division and State Forester. N/A.

V. Recommendation for WFAC Letter of Support for Prescribed Fire Strategic Action Plan

- a. Chris Martin – DNR put a lot of work into the plan and is doing a lot of work to get prescribed fire off the ground. Prescribed fire is arguably the most cost effective fuel treatment option there is. The Committee could acknowledge the good work that DNR did in the plan and give recommendation to support and implement it. The grants requested were double what was available, so there is high demand for this work.

- b. Allen Lebovitz – It is within the charter of the committee to provide recommendations to the Commissioner. Would like to get the opinion of the whole committee on whether this is something we want to take on. The committee will need to review the full report and take some time processing it. Then potentially consider drafting a letter of support.

- c. Wade Pierce – Overall I support it, but could it be an option to provide a specific recommendation. Concerned over potential risk to the group or individuals.

- d. Tony Craven – I think it's a good idea to support this action and endorse the plan. The point of this committee is to make recommendations, sometimes there could be negative consequences but that is part of being on the committee. I don't see any negative consequences with this either.



- e. Melanie Bacon – I support this action. Who would this letter be specifically addressed to? A: To the Commissioner, that is what the charter charges us with is advising the Commissioner.

VI. Washington State Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan Review

- a. Moved to next committee meeting.

VII. Transition to the Critical Incident Management System

- a. David Way, Gary Berndt, Bob Gear – A workgroup to make recommendations regarding the CIM transition was begun in April, as previously reported to this committee. The plan was to have draft recommendations to George in July. Due to fire season, this was delayed, but should be complete by end of September. Early in the summer the Pacific Northwest Coordinating Groups Operations Committee put together a plan for transition to CIM from the PNWs perspective and part of that had some drawdown planning for incident management teams and some specific commentary about intentions for assigning local teams to local fires. There are only to be rare exceptions where the northwest area is going to assign a northwest team to a local fire, the NMAC is going to control the national rotation and their intention is that we use the next team in the rotation. This is what the workgroup feared would be the case and informs our recommendations going forward, in alignment with the Washington Wildland Fire Protection 10 year Strategic Plan.

One recommendation is that the work group will continue beyond September of 2023 to monitor the changes as they come down from national. Proposing WA create oversight committee. The other recommendations include:

1. Build IMT capacity
2. Implement Washington State IMT governance
3. Develop Type 3 IMT and CIMT relationship
4. Implement Agency Administrator Transition and Training.

Recommendation 1 – Primary issue is one of capacity, not complexity, not enough people to meet needs. To address this DNR to assume a leadership role in collaborating and developing incentives within Washington State Interagency Wildland Fire Service to increase participation in the number of wildland firefighters, incident support staff, command and general staff and other NWCG qualified participants to meet the need of current and future fires and all-hazard response in Washington State.

Recommendation 2 – Restore management of WA Hosted Interagency IMTs with the intent that at least one CIMT is always made available to the Geographic Area or National Rotation and new additional CIMTs are added to the regional capacity. WA IMT oversight committee would lead this development and implementation.

Recommendation 3 – Develop successional plans within each Type 3 IMT to recruit, train, and evaluate which C&G individuals are on track to progress to CIMT and develop further successional planning strategies for these IMTs.



Recommendation 4 – The interagency CIM workgroup work with Agency leadership to implement and Agency Administrator Training/Workshop in the off season to help prepare new and existing AAs for the transition to CIM.

- b. Russ Lane – I wanted to emphasize from George’s intent, to fully implement CIMT in Washington, we are fully committed to make that move. Wants the solution for Washington to be interagency. The solution will address all hazards, I think we can improve in Washington to add the complexity and not just be prepared for wildfires. The timeline is important, we had a conversation at the PNWCG this week potentially allow WA more governance on the teams we host, availability to the national system. Important we take care of our responsibilities first while still supporting the national system.
- c. Gary Berndt – When I stopped leading teams in 2012 WA had say over 5 teams, now it’s down to 3. It’s one of our top concerns to build back up that capacity and we believe these recommendations will address it.
- d. Cody Rohrbach – Based on all the information we have now, we have made a good decision. Support all the recommendations.
- e. K.C. Whitehouse – I’ll be the first to admit that I have changed my thinking from back in April. Seeing the NMAC memo and this fire season, I am in support of WA standing up CIMT. The ask I have is to make sure from the DNR standpoint that our forest land response agreements with fire districts continue to allow cooperators to participate in the PNW interagency teams and not just be locked into Washington teams.
- f. Wade Pierce – Want to make the point that not everyone in this group is fluent in all the acronyms and lingo that the professional fire service personnel is. The content of your message can be lost. Otherwise support WA moving forward to retain local control of teams.
- g. Gary Berndt – The terminology has continually changed but we do need to translate it to a common language.
- h. Russ Lane – One of the risks from this transition is that all teams become national teams. Those decisions may not be made based on regional need, we lose some self-determination and may not be able to deploy teams that have local knowledge and experience. We have not had good experience with resources controlled at the national level. We will hit those time were we’ve exceeded capacity and will be happy to take any assistance, but always going to have a preference for the home team.
- i. Allen Lebovitz – Agency administrators are valuable in this process because they can help bridge the gap with out of area teams and advise them on the local knowledge and connections that they don’t have.



- j. Gary Berndt – The idea is that it’s a new national model and even experienced administrators don’t know it, and it’s really difficult to find administrators who have that experience. We are going to have to train them as well.
- k. Bob Gear (Work Group Member) – I came in to this as a double doubter, I was not supportive of having everything becoming a CIMT having worked with Type 2 teams that were not very good. I am also not supportive of WA taking its teams out of the interagency system. I do not support the loss of local governance that the current trajectory of the National level.
- l. David Way – Are goal is to still have the same interagency teams, but to gain back local governance of these teams.
- m. Cody Rohrbach – The intent is not to change those interagency teams, but to retain decision making capacity. Ultimately what is in the State’s sphere of influence, and we support WA making decisions with that sphere. We still want these diverse teams and the value they bring.
- n. Allen – We’ve mentioned the NMAC memo, could you speak to it?
- o. Russ Lane – Probably best not to give it too much air time, NMAC has already rescinded the memo due to the push back against it. It laid out activation and allocation of teams, based on number of assignment, who had more than others, even for emerging incidents which is normally a local decision. They said you had to meet certain criteria, imminent threat to life and property and set a really high bar for local determination on what teams get to what fires. They are reevaluating the 7 day downtime for IMTs, which caused a lot pushback as well. NMAC has taken a really assertive model on control of resources in the country.
- p. Tony Craven – Why does NMAC send teams places they have no local knowledge and experience? A: From a national level this plan makes a lot of sense, but from the local level up it makes less sense. They have workload to balance out nationally.
- q. Allen Lebovitz – We have not discussed the issue of capacity.
- r. Bob Gear – The whole intent was to increase capacity, get more teams and more people on teams. Essentially all we did was mess with the complexity analysis.
- s. Russ Lane – We saw at PNWCG that Type 2 teams that followed CIM teams brought more capacity and experience than them and that’s a problem.
- t. Allen Lebovitz – There was a recommendation of doubling down on Type 3 teams to cover, don’t know if it solves some of the local control issues.
- u. Russ Lane – We have probably the best Type 3 systems in the country that I am aware of, and we need to take advantage of that as a personnel option to build new teams. We can probably build a CIM team from what we are getting.



- v. Melissa Gannie – I am interested in the workforce development. If we can both take advantage of funds. Our office was funded for a feasibility study across our IT infrastructure, to procure a learning records management system paired with a training records management system. It is not fun to be in front of locals trying to explain why the fire is being managed the way it is when the team is from out of the area and locals don't feel there is skin in the game, anything we can do to bridge that gap and retain as much local support is important.
- w. Tom Smith – A lot of teams don't really have a good sense of how we do things in the PNW, if they are from the south. I know we have liaison opportunities at the IC level but can we integrate local ops experience at the section level?
- x. Kari Grover-Wier – It's really good to hear what the State is thinking. As an agency administrator I share the concerns about out of area teams, we have similar issues at the federal level from out of area teams. There are complexities in how the Forest Service will be involved in how WA moves forward.
- y. Valentino Villaluz - Support prioritizing local teams first, we spend a lot of time on building interagency capacity, understanding, and collaboration and that is not always visible to IC's from out of the area. However can support this will do so.
- z. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – On the workforce development part don't forget high schools, it's a critical time when they are deciding their futures, and if we can focus on that we can have better success.
- aa. Samantha Schinnell – This discussion helps as on the team side sometimes we are the outside responder and finding examples where that went well and how we can integrate that to help outside teams be more successful.

VIII. Roundtable, Public Comment, Future Topics

- a. Sammi Schinnell – The Nature Conservancy is supporting two big prescribed fire training events. They are 2 week long prescribed fire trainings where we have people from all over the country and Canada. We have one happening in Spokane and in Deer Park starting October 1st. We have one based out of Trout Lake on October 9th. This is part of how we can support workforce development.
- b. Wade Pierce – Regarding the Oregon Fire, by afternoon on day 2 the three industry landowners had been working together. Opened up 20 miles of road, built 2 miles of dozer line that was used for containment. Need to be creative on working with the timber industry on how to deal with reimbursement for that work, we had crews working 5am to 5pm for many days. Important to reflect on our success and areas of improvement.
- c. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – Regarding Maui, I suspect a good response plan would have made a difference there. I have talked with Whatcom County on a response plan as a high priority. What has the State done to look in to making sure all our counties have them?



- d. Carlene Anders – Want to thank the DNR response, speaks to the work that has been done last 10 years.

IX. Adjourn

- a. Meeting is adjourned at 3:58pm

X. Appendices

- a. Attendance
- b. CIMT Transition Presentation

Draft minutes submitted by Bryan Perrenod, approved by Chairman Allen Lebovitz. Formal action to be taken to approve the minutes at the next general meeting.