



Lessons Learned

COVID-19 Wildland Fire Response Plan Assignment



Area Command Teams 1, 2, 3 and Eastern Area Type 2 IMT



Incident Name and Type: COVID-19 Wildland Fire Response Plans

Date: May 4th, 2020

Applicable Areas: *Alaska, Pacific Southwest (addresses both Northern CA and Southern CA under one plan), Eastern, Great Basin, Northern Rockies, Northwest, Rocky Mountain, Southern, and Southwest*

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Executive Summary

This document summarizes the lessons learned by all three Area Command Teams (ACTs) and the Eastern Area IMT2 during the development of the nine Geographic Area Wildland Fire Response Plans – COVID-19.

While the purpose of this report is to document and share lessons learned during this assignment, it also provides some recommendations that may be beneficial to other audiences. These lessons learned will also be posted on the Lessons Learned web site and shared with NMAC and the respective geographic areas. These lessons learned will help support continuous improvements in the current wildland fire management system.

“This proved challenging yet rewarding due to the nature of working in a virtual environment.”

Consistency between the three ACTs was requested as part of the Delegation of Authority and leader’s intent. This proved challenging yet rewarding due to the nature of working in a virtual environment. The teams were ordered through the resource ordering system by the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) and worked for NMAC in a support role to develop the plans and deliver to the Geographic Areas (GAs). The ACT assignment began on March 17 with an in-briefing from NMAC. The first operational period began on March 19, 2020.

The assignment to prepare these wildland fire response plans necessitated a primary focus on information gathering, analysis, and synthesis into plans useable by all levels of the organization. As a

result, teams were configured in ways to accomplish this objective and not in ways to facilitate incident oversight and coordination of multiple teams.

Within ACT1, initially 11 positions were filled. As specific needs and objectives solidified, additional positions were added, and at the height of the assignment ACT1 was comprised of 19 members. This total included two individuals comprising a Central Planning Branch. Within ACT2, initially there were 12 positions filled including 5 trainees which increased to 19 members at the peak of the assignment. On ACT3, initially 12 positions were filled including 2 trainees. As plans neared completion, personnel were either demobilized or worked in an intermittent, "call when needed" status. This management option allowed optimal use of personnel and increased availability for permanent position tasks.

An additional planning and coordination group was formed to support all Teams and referred to as the "Central Planning Branch" (CPB). The objective of the CPB was to assist, support, and work with all ACTs and the IMT2 to maintain coordination and communication among the teams and provide for consistency in plan development. The CPB initially consisted of three individuals and later downsized to two individuals for the majority of the assignment. It reported accomplishments to ACT1 on a daily basis, attended all ACDR daily teleconference/videoconference calls, and worked laterally with all ACPCs/PSCs on the teams. Initially, the CPB developed a master WFRP template that included consistent verbiage regarding the issue, scope of the task, objectives, strategic considerations, and an outline and framework for Best Management Practices (BMP). Once the template was drafted and approved by the ACDRs, the CPB downsized with its primary focus transitioning to assisting in plan development, updating COVID-19 related information in the WFRPs; serving as writers/editors/reviewers; compiling a master glossary and list of references; providing software, hardware, cloud-sharing, and FireNet365 support; and numerous other tasks, as needed.

Each ACT and the IMT conducted extensive contacts with individuals on GA Coordinating Groups and within the GAs to gather information. This information was collated into thoughts on planning needs and considerations, possible actions, and immediate needs to help wildland fire management agencies and organizations sustain resource availability and maintain continuity in operations while providing for the safety and protection of personnel for the 2020 fire year.

The plans are intended to be a single point of reference, although not the only point of reference and provide considerations for those tasked with management of wildland fires. While the WFRPs are constructed for applicability at all levels, some of the information presented may not have the same utility for all participating agencies and organizations. The plans are focused on strategic thinking and considerations and intended to provide a higher-level framework of considerations and not specific operational procedures. They are not written in terms of "how to" but instead provide considerations of "what," "why," and "where" with a focus on the "mob to demob" time period.

The Best Management Practices provided in the Appendices are intended to offer information to help reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 spread during wildland fire management operations. However, BMPs may not offer the full detail that many would like to see. Because of potential changes from past experiences and practices, local personnel are strongly encouraged to practice, repeat, and understand the information provided in each BMP. In addition, as information continues to emerge, these plans should be supplemented by more locally prepared specific operational procedures developed at local level units.

Since all assigned teams were working under the same Delegation of Authority and on the same objectives, it was recognized that strong lateral inter-team coordination and interaction would be prerequisite to accomplishing the objectives. Consequently, the teams shared the CPB, a Public Information Officer, and produced a single Daily Action Plan (DAP) covering all team operations, tasks, schedules, and providing a source of information about daily efforts of the ACTs/IMT2. The teams utilized a single file sharing platform – Box, managed by CAL FIRE, and utilized screen sharing and video/audio conferencing capabilities through Zoom. Multiple video conferences among functional specialists, leaders, and with GA personnel were conducted on a daily basis. The current AC website was maintained as another source of information for a portion of the assignment.

Report Organization

Since this report represents a combined summation of all ACT/IMT lessons learned, it does not address information on a team-by-team basis. It is structured to provide information concerning specific areas of operation and what was encountered and learned in those areas. The following sections represent the specific topical areas where the teams identified new issues, resolution, and experiences that will be useful in continuing fire management activities.

Specific areas discussed include: Virtual Operations; Flexibility of Area Command Teams; Pandemic Response; Impacts to the Fire Management System; Additional Thoughts; and Documents Relevant to this Assignment.

Virtual Operations

➤ **Operating an organized incident management organization in a virtual environment.** This has not previously been performed on a routine basis. Working in such an environment creates both challenges and opportunities. Generally, ACTs/IMTs function in a facility or Incident Command Post (ICP) where face-to-face communications are the norm. Virtual operations necessitate all team members to work from remote locations, utilize specific screen sharing, video and audio conference platforms such as Zoom, teleconference calls, and Firenet365; file sharing platforms such as Box and Firenet365; chat platforms; email; and texting. There is somewhat of a learning curve for some of the applications but this was temporary and did not markedly hinder operations.

Challenges: Understanding what functional changes are caused by working in a virtual environment; learning new applications while on assignment; maintaining strong and constant communications; building awareness of technological limitations such as unstable internet, broadband bandwidth issues, equipment variability and capability, and obtaining proper equipment.

Recommendations: Brief ACTs/IMTs on the role of incident management in a virtual environment, differences from past experience, requirements, and expectations. Have ACTs/IMTs practice working remotely, have simulations and identify appropriate remote work units. Obtain necessary equipment upgrades and technology prior to expected fire season activity. Increase understanding that while working remotely, it is not really possible to **over-communicate**, and reinforce the importance of constant communication. Increase awareness that a virtual work environment can slow progress, additional time will be needed for clarification of information, confirmation of information receipt, and ensuring that there is a common operating picture. Increase awareness of the importance of

making correct points of contact for the task when working virtual. Sometimes contacts made remotely were with the wrong individual and a more optimal person or SME was later discovered.

- **Future expansion to more virtual working environment operations.** Significant movement to virtual operating principles is being discussed for the 2020 fire year and beyond. All agencies that participate must recognize advantages and disadvantages of this operational scenario. Hardware, software, number of laptops, smart phones, tablets, bandwidth, connectivity issues are a short list of investments that must be considered. It is likely that these operating principles and capabilities may be utilized long after the pandemic is resolved. As such, operating standards and protocols may go through a permanent transition in 2020 resulting in a wider range of management capabilities and options. Wise investments for the long-term virtual environment must be given serious consideration and implemented. This type of working environment will be much more dependent on information technology (IT) applications and support and preparations are critical to success.

If virtual engagement becomes a new norm for the upcoming fire year and beyond, an effort early on needs to be made to have agency IT staff prepare “How To” and/or “User Guides/Troubleshooting” for the various teleconferencing platforms and ensure that they are understandable and accessible. IT staff aren’t always readily available to assist users with issues connecting to meetings, and contingency options are recommended (i.e., phone lines to call in for audio connections to meetings).

This assignment demonstrated the successful completion of the assigned task while working remotely and confirms that this is a viable option for some situations. Variations to how it is implemented are also possible (i.e., partial off-site work combined with on-site work). All teams experienced both challenges and opportunities of the virtual environment. It is suggested and encouraged to move this operating principle forward regardless of the pandemic environment. Operating in a virtual environment for IMTs can result in many team members not driving to the incident reducing driving exposure and a potential cost savings when considering travel expenses (fuel, mileage, lodging, per diem). This could foster an increasing willingness to participate on IMTs because of the opportunity to work from a home base. This could also result in increased numbers of participating employees and inclusion of additional skills and knowledge.

- **New standards.** Virtual assignments will require a consideration of new standards for length of commitment and R&R. The current standards were established to allow responders to return home, pay bills, do laundry, and reconnect with family and host agencies. Virtual environments allow for most of these conveniences throughout the assignment. However, exhaustion of personnel is an important consideration, especially when personnel are navigating additional family responsibilities in the new COVID-19 work-at-home environment.

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- **Training opportunities in a virtual assignment.** Working in a virtual environment causes unique challenges for completion of training assignments. Training Officers and evaluators cannot meet face-to-face with trainees. NWCG Task Book accomplishment is constrained as many tasks required for completion on an incident could not be completed on this assignment although for teams managing incidents remotely in the future, that may be less of a limitation. Trainees did learn and thrive in this environment and they are expected to be equally successful in any similar event.

➤ **Concurrent assignment and home unit responsibilities.** Some team members remained partially committed to day jobs, which in past experience, would mostly drop off so they could focus on the incident at hand. Under the virtual experience and due to the perspective of this assignment being a non-fire assignment, day job duties remained to some extent. Time management became critical under this environment. It is important to understand what level of commitment will be required when individuals are ordered through the resource ordering system, regardless of the specific nature of the assignment. Individuals accepting a resource orders and their supervisors must be prepared to support assignment duties and be fully committed when appropriate in the same manner as for a non-virtual assignment.

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➤ **Cultural changes/virtual environments.** Education and cultural shifts are required of team members to transition to working in virtual environments. Many team members have enjoyed fire camp environments, associating and reconnecting with old friends, sharing the camaraderie and sense of belonging afforded by historical team operating environments. Cultural change must be accepted and understood as necessary to enable the fire management system to adapt and change in response to new challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The number one value to be protected is human life. Organizations must get past preconceptions and improve understanding that the virtual working environment needs to become institutionalized where appropriate. It becomes a question of commitment, desire, and direction to make necessary adjustments.

Rather than total reliance on our current workforce to learn/adapt to new technology, other considerations should be explored such as contracting in the areas of virtual connectivity systems.

Flexibility of Area Command

➤ **Flexibility of ICS Organizations and Area Command.** There seems to be a continual progression in regard to the awareness, understanding of, and efficient use of ICS capabilities. In particular, the effective role and use and non-use of Area Command has continued to surface during periods of high incident activity. Much of the non-use of Area Command is associated with a lack of understanding of roles and capabilities as well as decreasing experience of line officers with Area Command. The Incident Command System (ICS) is constructed to afford managers the highest degree of flexibility while ensuring safe supervision and operations in incident management. Organizations within ICS such as Area Command, IMTs, and National Incident Management Organizations (NIMO). ICS allows managers a variety of options capable of accomplishing a very wide range of objectives.

Most experience has been gained from the use of these organizations on wildland fire events although all teams are suitable for non-fire assignments. Area Command specifically offers great flexibility in that it has the ability to expand or shrink as needed very quickly, is highly mobile, and has a record of successful completion of many non-fire assignments (hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, Columbia space shuttle recovery, Exotic Newcastle Disease, avian and turkey flu events, agency-specific events, Presidential visits to NPS units, etc.).

Several valuable lessons can be gleaned from this assignment. First, the nature of this as a non-fire assignment demonstrates the flexible capability of Area Command and that skill sets can be utilized

for a variety of objectives. This lesson should be significant to the coordination system, national decision makers, and Agency Administrators.

Secondly, an additional lesson here is that attentiveness is necessary to not over-emphasize the range of potential non-fire ACT assignments and lose sight of the need for increased emphasis on the use of ACTs in complex fire management. In order to continue personnel development and maintain an inflow of new personnel into Area Command team cadres, fire management decision makers need to elevate this awareness, encourage improved understanding, and capitalize on advancing skill sets to sustain the capability to support the national fire management system.

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Lastly, the fact that some of the ACTs on this assignment staffed up with additional positions not usually carried on teams (i.e., Operations, Liaison) further demonstrates flexibility. The lesson here is ACT should not be constrained by conventional thinking. Rather, ACTs can be used in new and innovative ways, in remote working environments, and can be augmented by key positions to become capable of managing incidents as short IMTs.

- **Progressive action.** Having NMAC order and delegate the responsibility for completing these plans to the three ACTs and one IMT2 shows application and full use of available skills and knowledge. This further demonstrates active, progressive leadership. Future opportunities will take place at higher Preparedness Levels and hopefully line officers will continue to improve understanding and again exercise this option.
- **Additional Staffing.** The Liaison Officer (LOFR) position that coordinated with NMAC was an essential resource for this assignment. Utilizing this position on an ACT in a situation where a significant number of interagency contacts was necessary substantially increased productivity by providing a single point of contact with the GA, MAC, and Agency Administrators.

Pandemic Response

- **Event Seriousness.** The sheer magnitude of COVID-19 pandemic reinforces the seriousness of this disease and its spread. The occurrence rate of fatality after exposure is significant. This assignment afforded a firsthand opportunity to view how others see this seriousness and urgency for defining working procedures and protocols. What has been observed ranges from “we really get this” to “why are we wasting time on this; it will be over before the fire year begins in the West.” The last observation is reflective of either a denial of the situation because of insufficient information, inadequate agency leader’s intent, or a very strong reluctance to make any changes from past experiences and protocols. In some cases, individuals may simply be migrating to more of a safe, comfortable position.

Wildland firefighting has always been dangerous and sometimes deadly. The COVID-19 virus pandemic adds a significant element of additional complexity and risk. Failure to recognize this and react appropriately will only create greater opportunities for disease spread, loss of response capability, and jeopardize safety for not only individuals who ignore the seriousness but for all those associated and in contact with them.

The lesson here is that the COVID-19 message and fire management direction must be communicated, clearly understood, and endorsed by all individuals involved in wildland fire response. There must be an urgent focus to identify measures and implement them to ensure sustained wildland fire response capability and personnel safety. It is the responsibility of the respective geographic areas and all units within those GAs to provide leadership for this effort and continue to share, learn and exchange information to refine best management practices after the Wildland Fire Response Plans are delivered.

➤ **National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.** A possible missing component is the connection to the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. The paraphrased vision is “put fires out when we need to, allow fire to play a natural role when appropriate, manage our natural resources, and as a nation live with wildland fire.” Up to this point, we have collectively been “learning” to live with wildland fire. COVID-19 adds complexity and some of the protocols and procedures being developed under the pandemic may affect the ability to accomplish wildfire response, community protection, and enhanced landscape resiliency. There is a need for interagency message development and delivery to both employees and the public to address the emerging situation, how it will be responded to this year, and what any long-term ramifications might be. Messages need to point to shifts in efforts while clearly articulating that objectives will still be accomplished. The ability to complete accelerated fuel treatments and vegetative management activities and use unplanned wildland fires to create landscape resiliency may suffer due to necessary measures to protect personnel but may also continue in appropriate area, under appropriate conditions, and at appropriate scales. Communication with the public regarding the Cohesive Strategy and COVID-19 is paramount and must be a firm commitment.

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➤ **Decreases in IMT availability.** Much information is surfacing on thoughts about confining agency personnel to home states, not accepting individuals from other locations, and quarantining individuals before certain assignments. During this assignment, it was learned that for one GA T1 IMT, nearly an entire Logistics Section had chosen not to participate on the team due to COVID-19 exposure concerns. It is likely that similar decisions are or will be made by members of other teams, across the country. Options to maximize IMT capability need to be addressed sooner rather than later. Examples might include merging IMTs but reducing overall team numbers; utilizing the intellectual property of fully qualified individuals unwilling to travel through remote working scenarios and using either a lesser qualified person or a trainee in the positions on-site. This would capitalize on skills and expertise, maintain continuity of operations for the IMTs, and not dilute qualifications standards. Such alternatives could maximize training opportunities and still utilize skills sets of those that choose not to engage on-scene because of exposure issues.

➤ **Cache System.** There are bright spots in the face of COVID-19 and wildland fire response. The national cache managers formed a risk assessment group to help them frame the future of being a key component of incident response while keeping their employees safe and healthy. Often taken for granted, the cache system actually does function well with little national oversight due to the strength and commitment of employees. This kind of proactive response to the situation was

encountered during the development of these plans and should serve as an example to other functional groups in wildland fire management.

- **Lessons being learned on recent wildfires.** The experience of the Lolo Hotshots in responding to a fire 1.5 hours from their base is discussed in a paper prepared by them after the fire in mid-April. They found that no definition was given of “local” fires which compounded their response time while clarification was pursued. Some proposed best practices actually proved to be impractical or increased risk. Emerging AARs and Lessons Learned during responses this year need to be widely shared and available for all units and continued clarification and refinement of best practices should be an ongoing objective.
- **Medical Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).** The ACTs have in-depth knowledge of the fire culture necessary to setting protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among firefighters. However, they do not have ready access to Subject Matter Experts, in this case medical professionals such as epidemiologists, who can assist with the development of the protocols, and ensure the proposed protocols are effective. Relationships with and involvement by epidemiologists will markedly improve our ability to understand complexities of this situation and help improve best practices.

Impacts to the Fire Management System

- **Cultural Change.** Currently as wildland fire management is being pushed into operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, a cultural change is occurring. An outcome of this change could be a shift of some elements of wildland fire operations into a remotely managed scenario at a much larger scale.
- **Strategic Direction:** Due to the lack of available resources, complex incident management response may result in longer assignments and need for scheduling days in a manner that enables the team to function (one or two key team members at a time).

Consider pre-positioning ACTs at a GA level when projections indicate multiple large fires. Pre-positioning would enable ACTs to either gather situational awareness for potential assignments or to assist the geographic area with strategic planning and risk informed decision making (including considerations for COVID-19).

- **Technology:** Advancements in technology must be identified and utilized to support the existing wildland fire system. Increased reliance on communication systems, UAS, and use of private sector intellectual property may help improve decision-making and overall response capabilities.

Functional Area Inputs

Logistics: Development of the Logistics Section BMPs on this assignment clearly illuminated the fact that additional in-depth planning is necessary to resolve issues associated with COVID-19 protocols and logistical support. Specific areas of concern include, but are not limited to caterers, dining areas, food serving lines, base camp layouts, sanitation facilities, trash removal, parking areas, screening areas, accessibility, ground support, communications, transportation exposure, and potential quarantine.

Medical - While e extremely good work was done internally on a difficult task, the individuals involved with this at the IMT level bring different perspectives. MPHAT, with their strong medical expertise, was a

good addition of expert knowledge but should have been a part of the assignment from the very beginning.

Inter-team communication via videoconferencing improved both communication and morale as opposed to voice calls only. Videoconference calls felt more responsive and positive.

Aviation: This was a unique assignment and may be a preview of future tasking. The ACT configuration for a wildland fire assignment was kept in place even though the team was involved in areas that have not normally been in their area of influence.

ACAC's are, by nature, a collaborative group and constant communication was highly beneficial to accomplishing the objectives. Common work on developing BMPs made the process much smoother and efficient.

Safety: Safety was adequately addressed by all personnel on the teams, but a primary Safety Officer, (perhaps under NMAC or working with central planning) could have helped better assess when and where more attention was needed and potentially streamlined work.

Operations: There was value added by adding Operations qualified individuals to the ACTs. The focus groups in the GAs were helpful in getting ground perspective that otherwise would not have been captured in the coordinating group response levels.

Information: The lack of a message from NMAC created an unnecessary workload for the teams. Expanded clarification of the task being worked on may have prevented unneeded work and effort. A daily update message about process and progress could also have been helpful.

Communications/Information Technology: While working in the virtual environment was the best solution for this scenario, additional IT individuals would have been helpful in dealing with issues.

The Box application is a great concept but too many people were using it concurrently. File sharing is an absolute must on these types of assignments, but strict management of file numbers, owners, editors, and viewers would improve its or other file sharing apps efficiency in the future.

Larger Scale Perspectives – Expanded Planning

- Reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a larger scale perspective of wildland fire response and capabilities during a serious external influence such as the pandemic. Many lessons have been learned already with more undoubtedly ahead as implementation of revised and newly developed protocols and practices progresses. Reviewing the information that has been produced specific to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on wildland fire response raises attention to a larger scale perspective of this issue in terms of not only preparing for impacts from a single specific disease but preparing for all types of serious diseases and pandemics.

The lesson that can be learned is that being more proactive rather than strictly reactive can produce more timely, efficient, and positive results in response preparation for these types of incidents. The products, protocols, and lessons learned from this assignment can be used as catalysts for additional planning and product development to address other types of pandemics and impacts to wildland fire response. The experience gained here can be capitalized on to accelerate advance preparation for

similar events in the future. This should be considered, other examples should be reviewed, and potential actions should be identified and possibly, implemented.

Additional Thoughts

- Having 3 ACTs with the same delegation, same leaders' intent and developing a common operating picture for all is unique and similar to a unified command concept on a single incident or complex
- Culture change never happens easily or quickly. Teams need pre-season time and support to prepare for the various levels of response they will encounter in the 2020 fire season. There is anxiety out there around team preparedness and dealing with a mixture of virtual and a more normal environment.
- The Delegation of Authority from NMAC is an anomaly. IN almost all other past situations, the DOA was given by an Agency Administrator. The teams worked with another coordination function (GA Coordinating Groups) responsible for receiving and distribution of the response plans. These coordinating functions conceptually are also responsible for monitoring, updating, and sharing the changes with the stakeholders within the respective geographic areas. These plans will diminish in value unless the jurisdictional agencies within each geographic area embrace them and enhance them with their own specific direction coming from Agency Administrators. NMAC, with members having delegated authority from their respective agency must craft direction to the coordinating groups to ensure accountability is maintained. Some latitude must be left to local crews as well to have input about the level and type of risk they will accept.
- Conversations with PIOs in three GACCs, PIOs on T1 and T2 IMTs and members of coordination centers all revealed apprehension about our collective ability to shift almost fully into a virtual information management environment. The most significant weak spot is the uncertainty about adequate bandwidth, reliable connectivity, and the availability of high-quality current technology and software. The present incident management culture expects PIOs to provide much of their own equipment, personal hotspots, software licenses etc., which will not meet the projected increased need. The vulnerability of relying on virtual meetings was demonstrated daily as the ACT experienced our own connectivity and IT issues.
- Some of the feedback received through the Firenet365 surveys covered a lot of topics. Convening a smaller group from each functional area could be helpful in making sure that feedback was fully incorporated. Some feedback needs referred to the GACC, some may not be within the scope. Looking closely at feedback with even a small group could bring more diversity of thought. The brainstorming session around the table or break room is one thing lost when working virtual.
- This assignment pointed out potential difficulties of trying to accomplish a fire assignment with virtual IT tools. Computer bandwidth issues coupled with unreliable cell phone coverage created difficulties every day. We hold firefighters to certain “medical standards” (including hearing tests) prior to the pack test and red card issuance. We need the same development of “technical virtual standards” before we push IMTs to use these platforms for assignments. This assignment was probably the best you could hope for in those terms and it had failures every day.

- All ACTs experienced that once the initial WFRP was developed, the next GA was a variation of that theme. Recognizing and incorporating each GA's own unique situations was critical to the success of these plans.
- For ACT1 the Alaska GA proved somewhat unique, but after significant two-way communication between ACT1 and the Alaska stakeholders, a common operating picture stabilized. Significant dialog took place between ACT members, coordinating group members, IMT members, dispatch communities, agency administrators and other state, tribal, and private wildland fire service resources and was essential for successful plan development.
- Throughout the assignment all teams found it beneficial that an Area Command liaison was assigned by NMAC (Joe Reinarz). Additionally, Kerry Greene was helpful by consolidating the Public Information Officer input and coordinating with NIFC, webmasters, and external affairs. Information and Technology needs were initially managed by Kevin Hoffman and then Ernest Ortiz, which proved very helpful.
- Area Command Teams received comments and suggestions that had the potential to conflict with current policy and procedures. The scope of this assignment did not include changing policy. A lesson learned is to realize that when events such a pandemic necessitate a comprehensive review of protocols, producing recommendations for change and expansion from past practices and protocols, clarifications regarding policy conflicts must be anticipated and addressed. Having ready access to a national level policy subject matter expert or having them included in the assignment could help alleviate time delays, ensure clear guidance is provided, and reduce potential recommendations that conflict with policy.
- The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to require modifications to wildland fire response and management for an indefinite time period. However, there needs to be an assessment of threshold conditions (e.g., substantially lower rates of new infections, proven vaccines, or effective medical treatments) that will allow for easing of the WFRP listed practices that are designed to reduce COVID-19 spread. MPHAT, ERMA, or another science-based group should be assigned to consider this issue and provide recommendations.

Documents – Relevant to the ACT Assignment

- [Alaska WFRP](#)
- [Pacific Southwest WFRP](#)
- [Eastern Area WFRP](#)
- [Great Basin WFRP](#)
- [Northern Rockies WFRP](#)
- [Northwest WFRP](#)
- [Rocky Mountain WFRP](#)
- [Southern Area WFRP](#)
- [Southwest WFRP](#)
- [NMAC Delegation of Authority](#)
- [NMAC Leaders Intent](#)