



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Wyoming State Office
P.O. Box 1828
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82003-1828



In Reply Refer To:
9210 (931) P

August 10, 2007

Instruction Memorandum No. WY-2007-031
Expires: 9/30/2008

To: Field Managers
From: State Director
Subject: Fire and Aviation Safety Team Report and Follow-Up

In mid-July, a Fire and Aviation Safety Team (FAST) reviewed interagency wildland fire program operations in Wyoming; please take the time to review this report.

In evaluation, some of the safety deficiencies identified were previously documented in our statewide pre-season readiness evaluation, dispatch programmatic reviews, and associated action and correction plans. Midway through the wildland fire season, I am very concerned that we have not acted upon a few of these findings.

I have instructed the Wyoming State Office Fire staff to review the FAST team report to develop a BLM and associated interagency collaborative action plan. I am also requesting the State FMO to meet individually with each Zone FMO within the next 2 weeks to review FAST findings, recommendations, and action items.

In addition, I am requesting that you engage with your Zone Fire Management Officers (FMOs) to implement recommended corrective actions as soon as possible.

We have maintained an excellent fire and aviation safety record for the last 2 years through a preoccupation with failure, sensitivity to operations, and reluctance to simplify; please ensure you follow-up on these action items.

For additional information, please contact John Glenn, State Fire Management Officer, Wyoming State Office, at 307-775-6234.

/s/ Alan Rabinoff
Acting

2 Attachments:

- 1 - Wyoming BLM's Response to the Rocky Mountain Coordination Group's (RMCG) FAST team report (11 pp.)
- 2 - RMCG FAST report (26 pp.)

Attachment No. 1
Wyoming BLM Specific Action Items to the Rocky Mountain
Coordination Group Fire and Aviation Safety Team Fast Report

Casper Interagency Dispatch Area
East Zone
July 17, 2007

Finding No. 1 Staffing Issues at Casper Dispatch Center

“The Dispatch Center is not adequately staffed to meet the current zone needs. This is due to the vacancy of a Center Manager, Assistant Center Manager. This will be compounded with losing an IA dispatcher in mid August. The Dispatch has been covered with detailers on 2 week rotations. All of the individuals were greatly concerned with the Dispatch Center vacancies and lack of cohesiveness and continuity.”

Additional Background Information

In the spring of 2007, the Wyoming portion of the Route/Medicine Bow National Forest consolidated dispatch operations in the Casper dispatch center... The Forest was unable to fill the Assistant Dispatch Center Manager, in addition, the Center Manager resigned in early Jun, 2007. No applications were received for the Center Manager when it was advertised in July; we believe this was due to the new Interagency Fire Program Management (IFPM) System requirements to fill the position as a professional NRS/401. As of 7/31/07, a 3 week detailer plan is in place to staff Casper Dispatch.

Action Items:

*Short term, the BLM East Zone Fire Management Officer (FMO) in coordination with the Medicine Bow Route NF FMO needs to develop a dispatch staffing plan through the remainder of the 2007 wildland fire season. Reliance on the Craig Center Manager to do both jobs is **not** an option. If the FMOs are not able to accomplish this, they should seek assistance from the Wyoming State Office, R-2 Regional Office, and Rocky Mountain Coordination Center. **Due date 8/15/07**, action plan in writing submitted to the Wyoming State FMO*

*Long term, the East Zone FMO needs to re-advertise the center manager position for 30 days, utilizing both 401 and 455 (range tech) qualifications; a high emphasis should be placed on outreach and recruiting. Adjudication of Range Tech (455) applicants should be done in coordination with Wyoming State Office Human Resources to assure IFPM goals slated for 2009. **Due date 8/15/07***

Perceived problems or delays in dealing with Wyoming State Office Human Resources need to be immediately relayed to the Wyoming State FMO by the East Zone FMO for follow-up actions.

Finding No. 2 Air to Ground Radio Issues:

“Ordered aircraft is arriving on the incidents and unable to establish communications with the ground contact.”

Additional Background Information

In follow-up interviews with the acting Zone Fire Management Officer, this problem appears to be related to item Finding No. 3, the Natrona county 800 MHz radio issue. Currently, the Wyoming State Forestry contracted helicopter does not have 800 MHz capabilities, while most of Natrona County operates on 800 MHz; East Zone BLM units have 800 MHz capabilities, both mobile and portable.

Action Items:

Wyoming State Aviation Manager E-mailed “air to ground” radio protocols to Zone FMOs, and Aviation Managers on 7/26/07. Dispatch center managers, incident commanders, and pilots should not engage in tactical aviation operations unless positive communication is established. Zone FMO needs to relay this information ASAP to all fire personnel.

Finding No. 3 Natrona County Fire Resources utilizing 800 mgh

“Natrona County fire resources utilize 800mgh digital radios causing Casper resources to operate several radios creating unsafe communications.”

Additional Background Information

Discussions with Cathy Hutton (Acting Center Manger) on 7/26/07 regarding this issue reveal that this is directly related to the 800 MHz issue noted in the previous bullet item, and that the issue solely pertains to radio users primarily from VFDs who are infrequent users of programmable radios. The counties have been provided with programmable VHF radios through RFA that are NOT 800 MHz, and which are capable of establishing Air-to-Ground communications with aircraft on assigned Federal A-G frequencies. Federal aircraft have sometimes arrived over county incidents, and the VFD firefighters did not know how to use their programmable VHF radios, or did not know which channel or frequency to use. In some instances, it is possible they do not understand the proper procedures for effectively utilizing Air to Ground frequencies and Air resources.

Action Items:

Short term, improve the training and education given to the VFDs on how to operate their VHF (RFA) radios, and for the BLM Zone FMO/Aviation Manager to share with them the “Air to Ground Communications Tips” document that was e-mailed by the State Office on 7/26/07.

Long term, Zone FMO in coordination with cooperators should develop an interagency communication plan as a supplement to the Natrona County Operating Plan. Also, in coordination with Wyoming State Forestry, improve training and education given to the VFDs on how to operate their VHF (RFA) radios.

Finding No. 4 Radio Communications

“The removal and proposed relocation of the communications site at Laramie Peak is not complete. This has created a large area of dead spots. The communication system between the Medicine Bow NF and Casper Dispatch is not complete and causing several safety issues. The first being poor communications on 2 separate laptop computers utilizing voice over IP which has very poor sound quality and is reflected in 2 SAFENET’s previously filed. The second is requiring the dispatchers to utilize a console, computer and laptop to work a single IA incident.”

Action Items:

Short term, Medicine Bow NF communication radio system link was completed to Casper Dispatch on 7/27/07.

Long term, BLM East Zone FMO needs to monitor and engage FS on other listed communication deficiencies (Laramie Peak repeater). Unresolved or delayed issues and problems should be forwarded to Wyoming SFMO for coordination with FS Regional Office. Until issues are resolved, Zone FMO should update State FMO weekly on problems and issues.

Finding No. 5 Radio Communications Telephone

“After hour, calls into Casper Dispatch cannot forward to an outside line to reach the on call dispatcher.”

Action Items:

Per Cathy Hutton, a mitigating action is being implemented on June 26, 2007. After hours calls will now be automatically forwarded to a live person at an answering service (in the same manner that calls are forwarded at Rawlins and Cody Dispatch). The answering service will then contact the on-call Dispatcher and pass information and messages.

Finding No. 6 PPE Flight Operations

“Cooperators are Initial Attacking fires without utilizing proper PPE and communications. In a few of the many counties within the Zone, the local firefighters fly their fires with fixed wing aircraft without communication or cooperation of the ground and air resources.”

Additional Background Information

Over the last 7 years, RFA funding has provided PPE & communication equipment to cooperators throughout Wyoming. For incident specific wildland fires under BLM jurisdiction, Incident Commanders are instructed to communicate with cooperators; if possible, provide PPE and communications on scene. If on site mitigation can't be accomplished, cooperators should not be allowed to engage in wildland fire operations.

This major aviation safety concern can only be mitigated through educating the VFD firefighters about the critical importance of establishing positive Air-to-Ground and Air-to-Air communications with other resources on scene.

Action Items:

Short term action items: For wildland fires under BLM jurisdiction PPE & communication action items may include: filing a SafeNet, notifying the county fire warden and contacting Wyoming State Forestry.

For multiple or non BLM jurisdiction, BLM fire personnel should not engage if they feel their safety is threatened due to poor communications or lack of safety equipment.

The State AFMO will send a reminder out to all Unit Aviation Managers, and write a procedure in the forthcoming Aerial Detection SOP that requires that Federal aircraft arriving on a county fire scene perform two standard tasks before engaging in fire operations. (1) Conduct a high level reconnaissance to locate and identify all ground-based and aerial flight hazards prior to descending to lower operating altitudes. (2) Establish positive air to ground communications with ground resources on scene, and specifically ask if they have seen or are aware of any other aircraft in the area, prior to descending and engaging in fire operations. These should be occurring as a standard procedure already, and an occasional reminder will ensure these mitigating steps are being addressed on each and every fire to which aircraft are responding.

Finding No. 7 PPE Work/Rest

“During extended attack with non federal IC’s on a few fires, extended work hours were justified by documentation and rest hours were not adjusted to reflect hours worked.”

Action Items:

All Incident Commanders, regardless of agency affiliation, on wildland fires under BLM jurisdiction must follow established work rest guidelines. All BLM personnel must follow establish work/rest guidelines regardless of jurisdiction. Supervisors should spot check time reports, furthermore, payments to cooperators for wildland fire assistance on BLM fires should also be spot checked.

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

Mission Report

Cody Interagency Dispatch Area
North Zone
July 19, 2007

Cody Interagency Dispatch Center

Finding No. 1 Air Support

“Fixed wing recon flight availability has been greatly reduced due to lack of local vendors without cards.”

Action Items:

This is already being addressed by the State AFMO through the acquisition of a 14-28 day fixed wing aerial detection/reconnaissance flight services contract (through DOI-Aviation Management Directorate) utilizing long-term severity funds. AMD is in the process of procuring this aircraft that will be shared among all the fire Zones.

Finding No.2 EERAs

“When ordering local resources requiring an EERA they are greatly delayed due to them not being awarded and entered into the ROSS prior to fire season.”

Action Items:

Four to five newly developed EERAs are currently not in place, Dave Johnson, Incident Procurement Specialist, will complete by August 5, 2007. Thirty existing EERAs are in place in ROSS.

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

Mission Report

Pinedale Interagency Resources Meeting
Eastern Great Basin/Western Wyoming
July 20, 2007

Finding No. 1 State Air-To-Ground Communication

“The State Air-to-Ground communications plan incorporates 8 possible A-G frequencies within this area. This is causing a safety issue with communications especially during Initial Attack amongst the variety of IA resources that respond.”

Additional Background Information

There are many areas in the U.S. where two or more Geographic Areas and multiple agencies and dispatch centers have adjoining boundaries. All aircraft that are dispatched to an incident are provided with certain items of information including the Air-to-air and Air-to-Ground frequencies and call signs that are assigned to that particular incident. Section 24.13 of the Rocky Mountain Area Interagency Mobilization Guide further states that individual dispatch centers must have boundary airspace management procedures identified, and refers the user to the BLM National Aviation Plan or NAP which is Bureau policy. In the NAP, Section 8.6 a full page of directions and a sample checklist are provided which are designed to mitigate the safety issue identified in this finding.

Action Items:

By this policy, no aircraft should respond to any incident within 5 miles of a Center’s jurisdictional boundary unless the adjoining Center(s) are notified, and the information listed on the checklist is shared. It is the responsibility of every Center Manager to ensure that this procedure is read, known, and understood by every IA Dispatcher, and that the Boundary Airspace Plan and checklist are utilized in all such cases. There is no flexibility with this requirement.

Finding No. 2 WFS/Delegation of Authority

“All parties were concerned that during the Pole Creek Fire, a Type 3 incident, when it was identified during the second operational period that the incident covered multi-jurisdictional boundaries there was not a Delegation of Authority or WFS done.”

Additional Background Information

In follow-up discussions with BLM West Zone FMO on 8/2/07; after a significant rain event on the evening of the first burning period, the WFSA/Delegation issue was addressed between the Bridger Teton NF FMO and BLM West Zone FMO. Current Sublette County/Wyoming State Forestry policy doesn't require WFSA or Delegations.

Action Items:

Review projected containment date of the Pole Creek Fire after the rain event. . . While BLM/FS policy stipulates WFSA completion when wildfires escape initial attack (Reference Chapter 9, Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations). Some questions exist on when the fire was projected to be "contained." If the Pole Creek Fire was not contained within the first burning period, the West Zone FMO and Pinedale Field Office Manager in coordination with interagency partners should have engaged in WFSA development and delegation of authority agreements.

Suggest follow-up coordination meeting with Forest FMO, BLM FMO, County Fire Warden, and Pinedale Ranger District FMO.

Finding No. 3 BLM Resource responses

“Concern with delay in BLM resources responding to incidents on their lands increasing the work load upon the local county resources and Region 4 USFS ground resources. The local Operating Plan only allows 2 hours of mutual aid and therefore the county cooperators are allowed to be compensated and thus must be NWCG PMS 310-1 qualified or be released. There is a concern that the Bridger Teton NF resources, (Region 4) are called upon and have been Initial Attacking starts on the Wyoming West Zone BLM, (Region 2) administered lands. The West Zone BLM resources are stationed in Rock Springs which is 2 hours from the area. This may increase the work load upon the Teton Interagency Dispatch Center (TIDC is an All-Risk Dispatch Center) and causes the local resources to be committed longer due to the driving time for the BLM resources to arrive and take responsibility for their incidents.”

Additional Background Information

Historically, from 2001 to 2007, based on the DOI 1202 fire reporting system, the Kemmerer and Pinedale Field Offices have been low frequency wildland fire areas averaging 4 wildland fires per year on BLM jurisdiction. Through agreements with interagency partners, wildland fire initial response has been handled by county and federal cooperators.

Conversely, areas South of Rock Springs, including Flaming Gorge National Recreation area average about 54 fires per year from 2001 to 2007.

Action Items:

West Zone BLM FMO needs to meet with and address cooperator concerns. BLM initial attack coverage on the north half of Flaming Gorge should be articulated in discussions with USDA Forest Service Region 4. Examine possibility of pre-positioning BLM resources in the Pinedale Kemmerer areas during high tempo periods. Utilize long and short term severity funds to preposition and order additional BLM resources during high potential periods. Also, county standard operating plans should be reviewed and addressed for this area. Field Office personnel in Kemmerer and Pinedale should also be utilized for size up, incident command, and provide initial response if available (Utilize Fuels Specialists in Pinedale and Rawlins). Responsibility, West Zone Fire Management Officer. Due date, August 15, 2007.

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

Mission Report

**Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Area
West and South Zones**

July 23, 2007

Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center

Finding No. 1 BLM Staffing, Rawlins Dispatch

“The Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center is not fully staffed”

Additional Background Information

Staffing concerns articulated by the Rawlins Dispatch Center Manager have been expressed in four formal, informal reviews over the last year, and frequently during coordination meetings. With the loss of Forest Service participation in 2007, and Lander Field Office in 2008; the work load for Rawlins Dispatch has and will decline significantly. This continued insistence, habitual complaining, and fixation by the Rawlins Center Manager that the center is understaffed is not productive in solving the problems facing this dispatch center. Assignment of the assistant center manager to a Type I incident management team has also exacerbated the staffing problems and issues in Rawlins.

Action Items:

The Southern Zone FMO needs to council the Rawlins Center manager and focus on the Rawlins Dispatch Center review action plan, which, is yet to be completed. The Zone FMO needs to provide SFMO progress report on Rawlins Dispatch Center peer review, and readiness review; due date 8/15/07.

Finding No. 2 BLM Staffing, Assistant Center Manager Position

“The Assistant Center Manager position remains vacant since the application process has closed 6 weeks ago. The Senior Dispatcher is currently performing the duties of the Assistant Center Manager”

Action Items:

Selection made 8/1/07

Finding No. 2 Expanded Dispatch

“Expanded Dispatch has been a challenge to adequately support by the local agencies within the zone with qualified resources due to the involvement of the oil and gas impacts in the area.”

Additional Background Information

Oil and gas production is a high priority for Wyoming BLM and the nation; this fact has been brought out in four previous reviews with a strong recommendations and action items to develop capabilities outside the BLM within the local and surrounding communities and interagency partners; this action item has not been met.

Action Items:

The Zone FMO needs to clearly articulate measurable goals and expectations to the Rawlins Center Manger . . .See 2007 Programmatic Rawlins Dispatch review and associated action plan and due dates. Provide SFMO feedback on action items by 8/15/07

Finding No. 3 Rumors

“The rumors of absence of the helicopter and the West Zone absorbing the South Zone in next years BLM budget and planning is a distraction to everyone involved.”

Additional Background Information

The Bureau’s strategic aviation planning document and three tier plan were forwarded to the Southern Zone FMO in May of 2007; both in writing and verbally, the Zone FMO, Fire Operations Supervisor, and Helicopter Manager were informed of impending BLM national aviation plans and changes in the Wyoming BLM organization. A presentation on the Wyoming BLM three tier proposal was also presented at the Pre-Season Fire and Aviation meeting in Cody. These are not “rumors.” Furthermore, as part of the State Fire Readiness Review, the Zone FMO was instructed to communicate this information to all personnel in June.

Action Items:

As outlined in the State Readiness Review Action Plan, information pertaining to three tier and the Rawlins Helicopter program must be conveyed to all personnel in the Southern Zone by the FMO as soon as possible. Due date 8/15/07

Finding No. 4 Seminole Wilderness Fire

“The Seminole Fire was in a Wilderness Study Area and declared Wildfire Use. The fire was changed to a full suppression fire 3 days later when no resources were available for it at a National Planning Level of 2. After the Seminole Fire was declared a Suppression Fire, it received the ordered resources even though the National Planning Level was elevated to 4. The Seminole Fire had 2 injuries. This is a safety issue that reflects upon the lack of resources being available for a Wildfire Use fire causing management to expose suppression resources to a greater level of risk by changing an incident to a suppression fire.”

Action Items:

The Southern Zone FMO completed an After Action Review (AAR) of the Seminole Fire, this written AAR will be distributed and reviewed internally to address improvement opportunities and lessons learned. An accident investigation was conducted on one of the injuries incurred on the Seminole Fire; this will be disseminated and reviewed internally. Due date 8/15/07

RMCG

**Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST**

FINAL REPORT

July 2007

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

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Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

High accident and near miss frequency both nationally and geographically
Explosive fuels with rapid rates of spread, especially for this time of year
Extra eyes, ears, and independent thought with a focus on safety
Reinforce the importance of safety to the local field offices from the RMCG
Conduct an assessment and evaluate safety concerns and issues identified at the local levels and report them back to the RMCG

Objectives

- 1) Compliance with fatigue management and work/rest policies and national operational direction
- 2) Compliance with firefighter safety and health policies
- 3) Effective incident communications and dispatch support to fire resources during Initial and Extended Attack
- 4) Ability to staff and mobilize resource needs
- 5) Effectiveness in mitigating specific safety impacts affecting mission accomplishment
- 6) Compliance with local and national Dispatch policies, procedure and direction
- 7) Compliance with Policy or Procedures for Transition Management from Initial Attack to Type 3 IMT's, Type 2 IMT's and back
- 8) Active involvement of Line Officer oversight and management for Initial Attack and Type 3 operations
- 9) Validate command and control, training, qualifications, prevention activities, and other associated program elements as determined necessary by FAST
- 10) Document and/or assist with safety issues the IMT, local unit line officer or FMO asked to have addressed

Mission

The FAST conducted an independent assessment and evaluation of operational and managerial activities at the following locations;

Casper BLM
Casper Interagency Dispatch Center
Cody Interagency Dispatch Center
Shoshone N.F. North Zone at Cody
Ft Washakie BIA
Wyoming State Forestry Dist 4
Rawlins BLM
Any ongoing incident

The FAST will conduct an entry briefing and provide a copy of the DOA to the appropriate managers of the locations/incidents identified above.

The FAST is to provide technical or managerial assistance when requested and when necessary to immediately correct an identified critical problem. The FAST may also provide short term assistance in managing situations or incidents when requested by the incident, organization or operations.

Due to the interagency nature of the fire program in the RMCG the FAST review was conducted equally with no regard for specific agencies. The FAST was directed by the RMCG to not include the State of South Dakota, Black Hills National Forest and the Durango Dispatch areas.

Introduction

To be proactive with nationally recognized safety concerns emerging from the first half of the 2007 fire season, the Rocky Mountain Coordinating Group (RMCG) organized a Fire Aviation Safety Team (FAST).

The two person team met with members of RMCG in Denver, Monday July 16, 2007. The team's mission outline was to "provide an extra set of eyes, ears and independent thought with a focus on safety" this and a complete set of objectives were outlined in a Delegation Of Authority(DOA).

The team was to start in Wyoming and if time permitted cover Northwest Colorado. The mission's direction was more defined and areas further identified with a follow up meeting in Cheyenne with Wyoming's State FMO, and Wyoming's BLM FMO.

The mission's foundation was to assist with local safety issues by either elevating to higher levels or suggesting/supporting locally controlled solutions.

Methods and Procedures

Methods

On site inspections:

- Dispatch centers, aviation and ground based suppression resources.

Interviews :

- Interview questions were formulated from the DOA's list of objectives
- Interview process emphasized the importance of discussing local safety concerns
- Interviews were conducted with;
 - Dispatchers at all levels
 - Suppression crew members, module leaders, helitack crew and leader.
 - FMOs, AFMOs, FOSs,
 - Agency Administrators, District Ranger, Forest Supervisor, State District Foresters, County Fire Warden,
 - Helicopter pilot and mechanic
 - Units were asked the same general questions
 - Unique concerns were treated on "a case by case" basis

Procedures

The team determined a flexible schedule would allow more team latitude than trying to maintain a fixed schedule.

Flex Schedule Protocol:

- Maintain safe driving limits for the team
- Maintain adequate team rest/work hours
- As soon as known call ahead to the next unit to be visited
 - With arrival times and to answer any questions
 - Ask host unit to contact key local individuals
 - Not to show up at a unit unannounced
- Length on time spent at a location would be driven by that unit's needs
- Prioritize and visit as many units as schedule will allow
- Change schedule as safety issues arise

Entry briefing meeting:

- Present and discuss the objectives of the DOA and the FAST
- Organize the visit to least impact the ongoing operations
- Emphasize that the FAST is not a readiness review team

Let the unit raise any local safety concerns first and work in objective questions when and if needed at suitable times.

- Local safety issues are high priority

- The DOA allows the FAST to provide technical assistance to resolute the safety concerns at the local level
- The FAST can, through the finished report, elevate the concern to the RMCG
- IF necessary bring about correction of critical problems
- Amplify National Safety Problems associated with the current fire season to the Units visited
 - By attending and participating in unit briefings
 - Re-emphasize the importance of safety at the State, Regional and National levels

Exit meeting/briefing:

- The one major deviation from the DOA is that written segment reports were not left with the visited unit. One exception was Cody.
- The team's low number of members(2), daily driving limits, scheduled meeting times and schedules of visited unit personnel were the factors leading to the team's leader changing the exit report from written to verbal.
 - Verbal exit briefing were conducted from the team's written notes

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

Mission Reports

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

Mission Report

Casper Interagency Dispatch Area

East Zone

July 17, 2007

Findings

Casper Interagency Dispatch Center

Casper Interagency Dispatch Center was reviewed on Tuesday July 17th, 2007. The FAST met with the Acting Center Manager.

- The Dispatch Center is not adequately staffed to meet the current zone needs. This is due to the vacancy of a Center Manager, Assistant Center Manager.
- This will be compounded with losing an IA dispatcher in mid August. The Dispatch has been covered with detailers on 2 week rotations.
- Natrona County fire resources utilize 800mgh digital radios causing Casper resources to operate several radios creating unsafe communications.
- Ordered aircraft is arriving on the incidents and unable to establish communications with the ground contact.
- The removal and proposed relocation of the communications site at Laramie Peak is not complete. This has created a large area of dead spots.
- The communication system between the Medicine Bow NF and Casper Dispatch is not complete and causing several safety issues. The first being poor communications on 2 separate laptop computers utilizing voice over IP witch has very poor sound quality and is reflected in 2 SAFENET's previously filed. The second is requiring the dispatchers to utilize a consul, computer and laptop to work a single IA incident.
- After hour calls into Casper Dispatch cannot forward to an outside line to reach the on call dispatcher.

Casper BLM East Zone

Casper BLM East Zone was reviewed on Tuesday July 17th, 2007. The FAST met separately with the Zone FMO, FOS, and Engine #692 Module.

- All of the individuals where greatly concerned with the Dispatch Center vacancies and lack of cohesiveness and continuity.
- The Zone FMO reiterated the Medicine Bow NF communication safety concerns and continual push back of its completion date.
- The Zone FMO is concerned with the Acting Center Managers ability to continually be detailed in and out from her Center Manager duties at home.

- Cooperators are Initial Attacking fires without utilizing proper PPE and communications. In a few of the many counties within the Zone, the local firefighters fly their fires with fixed wing aircraft without communication or cooperation of the ground and air resources.
- During extended attack with non federal IC's on a few fires, extended work hours were justified by documentation and rest hours were not adjusted to reflect hours worked.

Commendations

Casper Interagency Dispatch Center

- The Casper BLM FMO is working with Craig BLM to have their Center Manager detail into Casper every 2 weeks in an attempt to keep continuity.
- Craig BLM is allowing their Center Manager to fill in at Casper in 2 week details.

Casper BLM

- The Casper BLM FMO has good communications with the State BLM Office.
- Casper BLM is providing training classes to the cooperators within the Zone.

Recommendations

Casper Interagency Dispatch Center

- The State BLM Office needs to expedite the application process to ensure a timely hiring process for the vacancies at Casper Dispatch. **(State)**
- With the increase of cooperators having to operate with Digital radios it is important that the Federal Fire Agencies explore opportunities to incorporate these systems into the Dispatch Centers. **(National)**
- The Annual Operating Plan needs to incorporate address the 2 different radio systems and incorporate a communications plan. **(Local)**
- The new location of the repeater that was removed from Laramie Peak needs to be identified and operational immediately. **(Regional)**
- The Casper Dispatch Center needs to have the Medicine Bow NF frequencies incorporated into their existing system to allow a Dispatcher to manage an incident from one location in the Center. **(Regional)**
- The phone system must be remedied to allow after hour calls to be forwarded to an outside line. **(State)**

Casper BLM

- Casper BLM should coordinate the training classes that it provides to the cooperators with the Wyoming State Rural Fire Trainer and the Wyoming Fire Academy. **(Local)**
- Casper BLM should continue to coordinate the safety issues on fires in the Zone with the County Fire Wardens and Wyoming State Forestry to jointly address mitigation opportunities and enforce practices with those involved. **(Local)**
(State)

Follow-up Actions Needed

Immediate

- Immediate action needs to be implemented to ensure proper and safe communications between the Casper Dispatch Center and the resources it supports. **(Local) (State) (Region)**

Long-term

- See recommendations

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

Mission Report

Cody Interagency Dispatch Area
North Zone
July 19, 2007

Findings

Cody Interagency Dispatch Center

Cody Interagency Dispatch Center was reviewed on Wednesday July 18th, 2007. The FAST met with the Center Manager.

- The Dispatch Center is adequately staffed to provide incident support up to Type 3 with current zone area.
- Expanded Dispatch has been adequately supported by the local agencies within the zone with qualified resources.
- The Ft Washakie Helicopter has had a history of requesting unexpected flight following with Cody Dispatch due to the Ft Washakie Dispatch closing while the helicopter is airborne.
- Cody Dispatch has implemented a SOP and checklist that has been approved and utilized by its neighboring GACC Dispatches in dealing with border fire issues.
- Fixed wing recon flight availability has been greatly reduced due to lack of local vendors without cards.
- When ordering local resources requiring an EERA they are greatly delayed due to them not being awarded and entered into the ROSS prior to fire season.

Shoshone NF North Zone

Shoshone NF North Zone was reviewed on Thursday July 19th, 2007. The FAST met the District Ranger, District AFMO, Dist AFMO Fuels, and Engine Module 421. (Dist FMO on fire assignment). The FAST Team Leader conducted a phone conference with the Forest Supervisor.

- Transitions of fires from Type 3 to Type 2 and back have been well organized with no reportable injuries.
- Morning briefing with fire resources is adequate. Forest Supervisor and District Ranger are actively involved with fire management.
- Work/rest and fatigue management meet national direction. Seasonal Firefighter training qualifications meet the minimum standards only.
- Heavy Engine #421 has had to be driven by the Module leaders who are the only personnel assigned to the engine with a CDL. This causes a safety concern in regards to safe driving practices due to the Module leader having to drive, perform Scene Size Up and Initial Attack at the same time.
- Forest Supervisor is concerned with not having the North Zone radios operating to full potential along with needed repairs till the end of July.

Commendations

Cody Interagency Dispatch Center

- Lessons Learned from Little Venus Incident in 2006 has improved line officer oversight, communications and procedures in many areas throughout the zone.
- Center Manager has been able to adequately staff expanded dispatch and after hour needs with qualified dispatchers from within the zones resource units.
- Local resource units and cooperators within the zone have a history of supporting the dispatch with qualified dispatchers.

Shoshone NF North Zone

- Good working relations with Region 1 regarding border fires and resources.
- Lessons Learned from Little Venus Incident in 2006 has improved line officer oversight, communications and operational procedures in many areas throughout the zone.

Recommendations

Cody Interagency Dispatch Center

- Continue to maintain staff levels that support the zone responsibilities. **(Local)**
- Proposed increase in zone area should be supported with an adequate increase in staffing. **(Local)**
- Immediate action needs to be implemented to ensure proper flight following for the Ft Washakie helicopter. **(Region)**
- Current SOP's and checklists regarding border fire issues should be reviewed in a timely manner. **(Local)**
- Elevate regional support to identify and card qualified local fixed wing vendors. **(Region)**
- EERA's need to be awarded and entered in ROSS prior to fire season. **(Region)**

Shoshone NF North Zone

- Continue to ensure the communications system repairs stay on schedule and are completed in a timely manner. **(Region)**
- Provide the CDL training to experienced seasonal firefighters who have demonstrated the skills to operate a heavy engine safely. **(Local)**

- Provide training opportunities to enhance firefighter safety awareness. **(Local)**

Follow-up Actions Needed

Immediate

- Immediate action needs to be implemented to ensure proper flight following for the Ft Washakie helicopter. **(Region)**

Long-term

- See recommendations.

RMCG
Fire Aviation Safety Team
FAST

Mission Report

Pinedale Interagency Resources Meeting
Eastern Great Basin/Western Wyoming
July 20th, 2007

Findings

Wyoming State Forestry District Office (Pinedale)

Wyoming State Forestry hosted a meeting for the FAST in Pinedale, WY at their District field office on Friday July 20, 2007. The FAST met with the Wyoming State Forestry District 4 Forester, the Assistant District Forester, Bridger Teton NF East Zone FMO (Region 4) and the Sublette County, WY, Fire Warden. The Wyoming West Zone FMO was on assignment out of state.

- There is a strong working relationship with the interagency resources.
- The recent Pole Creek Fire had 3 helicopters working the incident all with tail number call signs HE (Hotel Echo) or HX (Hotel X-ray). This caused a safety issue with communications on a rapidly escalating incident.
- The State Air-to-Ground communications plan incorporates 8 possible A-G frequencies within this area. This is causing a safety issue with communications especially during Initial Attack amongst the variety of IA resources that respond.
- All parties were concerned that during the Pole Creek Fire, a Type 3 incident, when it was identified during the second operational period that the incident covered multi-jurisdictional boundaries there was not a Delegation of Authority or WFSA done.
- Concern with delay in BLM resources responding to incidents on their lands increasing the work load upon the local county resources and Region 4 USFS ground resources. The local Operating Plan only allows 2 hours of mutual aid and therefore the county cooperators are allowed to be compensated and thus must be NWCG PMS 310-1 qualified or be released.

Bridger Teton NF Forest FMO

The FAST Team Leader met with the Bridger Teton Forest FMO via phone conversation.

- There is a concern that the Bridger Teton NF resources, (Region 4) are called upon and have been Initial Attacking starts on the Wyoming West Zone BLM, (Region 2) administered lands. The West Zone BLM resources are stationed in Rock Springs which is 2 hours from the area. This may increase the work load upon the Teton Interagency Dispatch Center (TIDC is an All-Risk Dispatch Center) and causes the local resources to be committed longer due to the driving time for the BLM resources to arrive and take responsibility for their incidents.

Commendations

Eastern Great Basin/Western Wyoming

- All the Agencies involved in this complex area are working well together to support a safe working environment.

Recommendations

Eastern Great Basin/Western Wyoming

Include a communications plan in the Annual operating Plan that mitigates confusing call signs and numbers for aircraft communications with ground resources. **(Local)**

The Aircraft Communications Plan for Wyoming is very complicated in Western Wyoming, particularly in the southwest area (Pinedale). It should be recommended that the Air to Ground frequencies be simplified in this area. Note an attached recommendation. **(State) (Region) (National)**

Adopt a policy of writing a DOA and WFSA in the Annual Operating Plan. **(Local)**

Encourage the BLM to work with the local Agencies to host a BLM ground resource in the Pinedale area. **(Local) (State)**

Follow-up Actions Needed

Immediate

- See Recommendations

Long-term

- See recommendations

RMCG Fire Aviation Safety Team FAST

Mission Report

**Ft Washakie BIA Fire Program
Ft Washakie, Wind River Agency
July 21, 2007**

Findings

Ft Washakie BIA Fire Program

Ft Washakie Fire Program was reviewed on Saturday July 21, 2007. The FAST met separately with the AFMO, Dispatcher, Engine Foreman/Station Manager and Engine

crew members after observing their combined morning briefing with their resources including the helitack module, pilot and mechanic.

- The delay in getting a repeater installed in the north end of their area to cover the numerous dead spots is a critical safety issue. This situation greatly impacts the ability of the helicopter and ground resources to communicate not only with Ft Washakie but Cody Dispatch as well.
- The reliance of human repeaters to mitigate the lack of a fixed or portable repeater is a safety issue.
- There are several safety concerns regarding the fire operations that revolve around the Ft Washakie Fire Dispatch located with the suppression resources in the same building.
- There is only one dispatcher on duty at any time and located at the front office.
- This poses numerous distractions and causes the dispatcher to address other issues outside and away from the radio.
- The Ft Washakie water system is continuously unreliable and non potable causing firefighters to have to purchase their own water and is a safety concern directed at proper hydration.

Ft Washakie Interagency Helitack

FT Washakie Interagency Helitack program was reviewed on Saturday July 21, 2007. The FAST met separately with the contract helicopter pilot and mechanic, helitack crew, helitack manager. All of these individuals related many of the same concerns with the security of the helicopter and the facilities.

- The helicopter remains over night in the same location at the helibase next to the BIA fire station which is not a properly secured location.
- It is on a pad adjacent to a creek and enclosed by a 4' fence with inadequate gates.
- The helicopter can be accessed by numerous locations during the day that are not controlled. The night lighting is very poor.
- There are no daytime accommodations for the pilot, mechanic, equipment or personal belongings.
- The helicopter has to fly over occupied homes and buildings upon approach and departure from the helibase.
- The helicopter has to initiate flight following with other dispatch centers on short notice because the Ft Washakie dispatcher is away from the radio or has left for the day causing a significant safety concern.

- The Ft Washakie helitack crewmembers, pilot and mechanic have been told to not drink the water because it is not reliably safe causing a significant safety concern relating to dehydration.
- The helitack crew is buying their own bottled water and the supply is inadequate and may result in dehydration with crew members.
- Most of the crew is under contract form out of the area and stays on the Fort after work hours significantly limiting their opportunity to properly re-hydrate due to the lack of tested safe drinking water.

Commendations

Ft Washakie Interagency Helitack

- The Helitack Manager is operating at a professional level and communicating well with his supervisors to improve and mitigate a few of the identified safety concerns.

Recommendations

Ft Washakie BIA Fire Program

- The BIA needs to install the repeater on the north end of the area to immediately rectify the communications safety issues. **(Local) (Regional) (National)**
- Ft Washakie BIA Fire Center needs to provide a qualified Dispatcher to manage the radio communications and be in place at the consul when aircraft are flight following with them. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Dispatch at the Ft Washakie BIA Fire Center needs to be staffed to a level that provides a qualified Dispatcher to work the consul and mitigate the necessity for that individual to have to leave the radio. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Ft Washakie Fire Program needs to be supported with safe reliable potable water for its resources. **(Local) (Regional)**

Ft Washakie Interagency Helitack

- Ensure that the Interagency Helicopter Operations Guidelines (IHOG) are being complied with. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Ft Washakie Helitack Module needs to be located at a secured facility with accommodations for the Module, Pilot and Mechanic. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Ft Washakie Helitack Module needs to operate from a location that provides for safe approach and departure routes for the helicopter and civilians. **(Local) (Regional)**

- Until the Ft Washakie Dispatch can be covered by a qualified Dispatcher at all times that the Helicopter is in the air the Helitack needs to initiate flight following with Casper Dispatch. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Ft Washakie Helitack Module, Pilot and Mechanic need to be supported with safe reliable potable water. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Ft Washakie water supply should be tested at the Fire Center and identify possible potable water alternatives for everyone working there. **(Local) (Regional)**

Follow-up Actions Needed

- **Immediate** The BIA needs to install the repeater on the north end of the area to immediately rectify the communications safety issues. **(Local) (Regional) (National)**
- Ft Washakie BIA Fire Center needs to provide a qualified Dispatcher to manage the radio communications and be in place at the consul when aircraft are flight following with them. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Dispatch at the Ft Washakie BIA Fire Center needs to be staffed to a level that provides a qualified Dispatcher to work the consul and mitigate the necessity for that individual to have to leave the radio. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Ft Washakie Fire Program needs to be supported with safe reliable potable water for its resources. **(Local) (Regional)**
- Ensure that the Interagency Helicopter Operations Guidelines (IHOG) are being complied with. **(Local) (Regional)**
- The Ft Washakie Helitack Module needs to be located at a secured facility with accommodations for the Module, Pilot and Mechanic. **(Local) (Regional)**

Long-term

- See remaining recommendations

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Mission Report

Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Area
West and South Zones

July 23, 2007

Findings

Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center

Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center was reviewed on Saturday July 22, 2007. The FAST met with the Center Manager.

- The Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center is not fully staffed.

- The Assistant Center Manager position remains vacant since the application process has closed 6 weeks ago.
- The Senior Dispatcher is currently performing the duties of the Assistant Center Manager.
- Expanded Dispatch has been a challenge to adequately support by the local agencies within the zone with qualified resources due to the involvement of the oil and gas impacts in the area.

Rawlins BLM South Zone

Rawlins BLM South Zone was reviewed on Sunday July 23, 2007. The FAST met separately with the Zone FMO and FOS. Rawlins BLM had all of the remaining resources committed to an incident including the Interagency Helitack.

- The rumors of absence of the helicopter and the West Zone absorbing the South Zone in next years BLM budget and planning is a distraction to everyone involved.
- Lack of fixed wing recon resources is a safety concern that impacts the ability for early fire detection.

Rawlins BLM South Zone

- Due to the lack of fixed wing aircraft the Zone has to perform fire detection recon flights with the helicopter.
- The absence of an Assistant Center Manager position is impacting the Dispatches ability to safely provide services and support particularly during Expanded Dispatch operations.
- The Field Office is not able to provide their qualified staff to assist in the Dispatch Center during after hours and in Expanded due to the Oil and Gas workload.
- The Seminole Fire was in a Wilderness Study Area and declared Wildfire Use. The fire was changed to a full suppression fire 3 days later when no resources were available for it at a National Planning Level of 2. After the Seminole Fire was declared a Suppression Fire it received the ordered resources even though the National Planning Level was elevated to 4. The Seminole Fire had 2 injuries. This is a safety issue that reflects upon the lack of resources being available for a Wildfire Use fire causing management to expose suppression resources to a greater level of risk by changing an incident to a suppression fire.
- Line Officer oversight is challenged to support Fire due to the demand of Oil and Gas development.

Commendations

Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center

- The Center Manager has changed his staff schedule to support the few qualified cooperators and Field Office Dispatchers that are more readily available on the weekends.
- The Senior Dispatcher has been performing the duties of the Assistant Center Manager.

Rawlins BLM South Zone

- Rawlins BLM Fire has done a commendable job in dealing with a recent turnover in Line Officers and the impact of the Oil and Gas.

Recommendations

Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center

- The Assistant Center Manager position needs to be filled as agreed to with the State Office. **(State)**
- The Field Office needs to accommodate the Rawlins Dispatch Center short term needs with utilizing its qualified Dispatchers to support incidents that require after hour and Expanded Dispatch coverage to ensure firefighter safety. **(Local) (State) (Regional)**

Rawlins BLM South Zone

- Support factual information flow regarding future fire operations in the Rawlins Zone to reduce the distractions to fire staff focus and maintain their safety. **(Local) (State) (Regional)**
- Elevate regional support to identify and card qualified local fixed wing vendors. **(Region)**
- The Field Office needs to accommodate the Rawlins Dispatch Center short term needs with utilizing its qualified Dispatchers to support incidents that require after hour and Expanded Dispatch coverage to ensure firefighter safety. **(Local) (State) (Regional)**
- Support staffing needs on Wildfire Use fires at a level that maintains firefighter safety. **(National)**
- Continue to recognize the need of the fire organization for Line Officer oversight and improve supporting that need in the time of an incident. **(State) (Regional)**

Follow-up Actions Needed

Immediate

- Immediate action needs to be implemented to fill the Assistant Center Manager vacancy. **(State)**

Long-term

- See recommendations

Analysis

- The FAST;
- Collectively reviewed all segment reports
- Weighed the impacts of issues that affected more than one unit
- Compared the important of an issue at all levels within the unit
- Looked for emerging trends
- Tried to determine individual issue importance as to minor, moderate, serious, or critical and then as a local, state, regional or national issue

Summary of Findings

- The overall appraisal of reviewed units basic fire safety programs were positive.
- There was a strong adherence by all units to work/ rest guidelines and actively recognizing individual personal fatigue levels.
- Continue to monitor work/rest guideline on incidents lasting several burning periods.
- Problems with Incident Communications were found at all areas.
- Inability to fill dispatching and fire positions are very serious to critical issues.
- Communication safety issues existed at one degree or another at all levels.
- Local fixes and mitigations are having to be implement to “make thing work at the ground level”
- Wyoming Dispatch Zones sharing boundary areas with Bridger Teton presently have strong a working relationship, agreements and SOPs are in place to cover most boundary fire issues.
- Most problems are ones of simple communication break downs.

- Some of the understandings and day by day working agreements may not be in written formal agreements or an SOP.
- Aviation both fixed wing and helicopter safety concerns need a more detailed assessment by an Aviation Safety Team
- Safe Driving habits were witnessed and supported with the lack of any reportable accidents in any of the areas reviewed

Summary Trends

- Incident Communications Problems mostly stem from under staffing at the dispatch centers. This inhibits their ability not only to cover daily, expanded and aviation dispatching but other duties as well.
- The low number of really available fixed wing aircraft for detention flights.
- The slow processing rate of the state office in filling critically needed fire and dispatch positions.

Summary Follow-up Actions Needed

Immediate

- Facilitate long term detailers at the Casper Dispatch.
- Complete radio hardware installation linking the Med Bow with Casper Dispatch.
- Explore speeding up processing of filling critical fire and dispatching staffing positions.
- Develop ground to air radio guidelines to mitigate radio confusion with having more than one aircraft with the same tail letters on the same or adjoining incident.
- Follow up two repeater problems one on Casper and one on Ft Washakie.
- Look into using portable repeaters for short term help.
- Clarify helicopter dispatching procedures to all affected parties with the Ft Washakie helicopter.

Long term

- Continue to identify and correct communications problems associated with staffing, and repeaters.

- Be proactive before the fire season with communications issues that will occur from any proposed future dispatching boundary changes.
- Work at having EERAs awarded before the fire season.
- Seek opportunities to improve local availability of fix wing airplanes.
- Continue to support strong inter regional cooperation with agreements and SOPs
- Look at reducing the response time of BLM's ground suppression resources to the Pinedale area.

On behalf of the review team, I would like to thank the Rocky Mountain Coordinating Group, Casper Interagency Dispatch Center, Casper BLM East Zone, Cody Interagency Dispatch Center, Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming State Forestry Division, Bridger Teton National Forest, Sublette County Fire Warden, Ft Washakie BIA, Ft Washakie Interagency Helitack, Rawlins Interagency Dispatch Center, Rawlins BLM South Zone and Wyoming BLM for their assistance during this review.

Please contact Hal Coombs, (970) 625-2371, if you have any questions about this report.

Signed by:

/s/ Hal Coombs

Hal Coombs,
Zone Safety & Training Specialist
UCR Interagency Fire Management Unit

/s/ Mike Bournazian

Mike Bournazian,
Rural Fire Trainer
Wyoming State Forestry Division