

COUNTY ASSIST TEAM



Operating Guidelines 2024

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AUTHORITIES

1. Montana Codes Annotated

Chapter Natural Resources General

Part 1. Protection from Fire

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation shall adopt rules to protect the natural resources of the state, including both state and private lands, from destruction by fire and for that purpose, in emergencies, may employ personnel and incur other expenses, when necessary.

2. Cooperative Fire Management Agreement

Between the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs - Portland and Billings Areas; U.S. Fish Wildlife Service - Rocky Mountain Region; U.S. Forest Service - Northern Region; and the State of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

3. Montana Emergency Operations Plan - All Hazard Response: DNRC has been designated as the lead agency under the Montana Emergency Operations Plan for coordinating response to wildland and structural fires within the State of Montana. In addition, DNRC is the designated lead agency for Dam Failures.

DNRC has been designated as a supporting agency for the following functions within the Montana Emergency Operations Plan:

- ❖ Coordination
 - Financial Management
 - Public Information
- ❖ Communications
- ❖ Damage Assessment
- ❖ Food Distribution
- ❖ Technical Assistance - Provide Incident Command & Incident Advisory personnel to assist in managing large scale operations. *[Technical Assistance]*
- ❖ Drought
- ❖ Hazmat & Other Disasters
 - Continuity of Government

GOVERNANCE

The County Assist Team (CAT) is governed by a Board of Directors (BOD). The CAT BOD charter is attached to this document as Appendix M.

The IC will determine the location and date for an annual spring meeting. The annual Board of Directors meeting will occur in conjunction with the spring meeting but will occur prior to the team meeting together.

The IC works with the Area Fire Management Officers of the Central, Eastern, Northeastern and Southern Land Offices to coordinate the yearly CAT Camp.

MISSION STATEMENT

The DNRC sponsors, organizes, prepares, and supports the County Assist Team (CAT) to fill a specific business need and provide a particular mission capability; being the provision of a capable, cost effective, and rapidly mobilized interagency incident management organization specializing in working with local government entities. The CAT, and its associated resources, primarily exist to help the DNRC Land Offices redeem their responsibilities and the responsibilities of local government in areas of County Coop fire protection when wildland fires exceed the capacity of local government and assisting agency organizations. However, as a team of expert practitioners of the Incident Command System (ICS) with diverse technical backgrounds, the CAT may also manage non-wildfire incidents and events as appropriate and needed. Typically, a local jurisdiction and/or DNRC Land Office would delegate authority to the CAT to:

- quickly establish command and control of incident resources
- prioritize the safety of both incident responders and the public
- effectively interface with local resources and establish effective communication
- assist and relieve local resources
- increase the capacity of local government and/or a DNRC land Office by providing access to additional resources
- provide planning, logistical, finance, and safety capacity that may not exist locally
- provide information to both local leaders and the public
- manage the incident in a fiscally responsible and cost-effective manner and apply controls
- document the incident and the business management functions associated with it
- provide training opportunities for personnel from county, local, and other fire protection agencies

All members of the CAT shall maintain NWCG qualification and certification for the position they hold, and all members of the CAT Command and General Staff shall maintain qualifications and certification according to National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) standards at, at least, the Type 3 level. The Team also serves as an important training and development pipeline for DNRC, and cooperating partner personnel interested in further developing their ICS qualifications.

CAT CORE VALUES

- Firefighter and public safety and welfare must always be our highest priority.
- We are professionals and treat one another with civility, dignity, and respect.
- Our success depends on healthy relationships, both internal and external.
- We will not tolerate discrimination or any form of harassment, including but not limited to sexual harassment or harassing conduct by or towards any team member, or other person in our workplace or jobsites.
- We are fiscally responsible and accountable for our efficiency and effectiveness.
- The public expects our team members to tell the truth, follow through on commitments, and act with integrity.
- People form the foundation of our success, and we invest in training and development which creates opportunity for organizational learning, continuous improvement, advancement, and succession.
- Team members shall conduct themselves in a professional manner knowing that the public may judge the organization on the behaviors demonstrated by those that represent it.

TEAM PROCEDURES

General

Each team member shall, from July 1 through September 15 (core season), be available, as much as possible, for wildland fire assignments. However, team members will be expected to have periods of time that they will not be available to maintain personal readiness and balance home unit work needs. Those periods of time will be communicated and planned to the greatest extent possible to backfill critical positions. Weekly availability will be communicated to the appropriate Section Chief who reports the section availability to the IC/IC designee each Monday morning prior to the Wildland Fire situation call. Availability during the remainder of the year will be on an as-needed basis.

Responsibilities - Agency Administrator/Line Officer:

- Prepares or begins preparation of the MT DNRC Incident Situation Analysis for the IC.
- Retains ultimate responsibility for the control of the incident, including mobilization and demobilization of the forces, equipment, supplies, etc. Provide briefing for team on arrival and debriefing on their departure. Provides team with an initial team briefing, including Agency Administrator objectives.
- Prepares a Delegation of Authority (Appendix G example) to manage or assist with the incident to the Incident Commander and may appoint an agency representative to work with the team.
- Establishes procedure for the release of incident information from the CAT.
- Is ultimately responsible for the assessment of the team effectiveness and performance. Annually the Board shall evaluate the CAT dispatch program as it pertains to the dispatch, mobilization, and demobilization of the team, as well as team performance. The Board is responsible for setting the time, date, and agenda.
- The hosting Land Office line officer will route Performance Evaluations to the Board members.

Responsibilities – All Team Members

- Notify the Team Coordinator or Section Chief (**or section Chief's designee**) between July 1 through September 15 of unavailability longer than twenty-four hours. Section Chiefs MUST keep apprised of availability of their personnel to facilitate mobilization and notify the IC of the ability to field their section. The Section Chief or their designee then will communicate section details to the IC/IC designee who functions as team coordinator. All individuals should notify their home dispatch office of pending resource orders when a team dispatch occurs.

Unique to most Incident Management Teams, the County Assist Team maintains availability throughout the predetermined seasonal time frame. As a result, most team members maintain their availability through much of that period. The Incident Commander's intent is that team members know that they will take time off throughout the core season as needed to mitigate individual personal needs in conjunction with home unit workloads and managing long term fatigue. The IC and section chiefs will monitor the team members for their physical and mental health.

Individuals who go on fire assignments other than with the CAT will ensure that they are taking proper days off per the Work/Rest and Work Length Policy prior to going on an assignment with the CAT.

Home unit supervisors and managers are responsible to monitor employees and if necessary, provide a day off. It is imperative that the physical and mental health of their employees are monitored.

Responsibilities - Command/General Staff Members

- The CAT is accountable to the Agency Administrator(s) of DNRC FPB, ELO, NELO, SLO, and CLO.

- The Command and General Staff must have at least the following 16 positions:
 - IC-1
 - LOFR-1
 - PIO-1
 - Logistics Section Chief plus 2
 - Operations Section Chief plus 2
 - Planning Section Chief plus 2
 - Safety Officer plus 1
 - Finance Section Chief plus 1

Under Normal configuration the CGS would have at a minimum 27 positions:

- IC-1
- DPIC-1
- LOFR-1
- PIO-2
- Logistics Section Chief plus 4
- Operations Section Chief plus 4
- Planning Section Chief plus 5
- Safety Officer plus two
- Finance Section Chief plus 2

****At times CAT members may be requested to fill a few critical positions on an ad-hoc basis for local incidents within a land office. This is accomplished at the discretion of the line officer by communicating with the IC beforehand.

- Command/General Staff are to maintain fire qualifications. Candidates for the team must meet all the prerequisites of training and experience. The basic requirements are set forth in the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) publication, "WILDLAND AND PRESCRIBED FIRE QUALIFICATION SYSTEM GUIDE, 310-1" and the DNRC "1100 Manual - Wildland Fire Management Training - Standards and Guidelines" unless otherwise specified. Qualifications are intended for an organized, Type 3 full team environment, although individuals are encouraged to seek additional qualifications at either Type 2 or Type 1 levels.
- The Command and General Staff shall provide incident training opportunities for trainee opportunities.

Responsibilities—IC

- In the absence of the Primary IC, assures the availability of an alternate that is a Type 3 IC.
- The IC shall provide agenda and times to the Board prior to seasonal and post-seasonal (as needed) meetings.
- Reviews Delegation of Authority with Responsible Parties daily.
- References within PMS-210 Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide.

Responsibilities - Deputy IC

- The Deputy shall assist the IC in any duties that need to be filled.
- The Deputy shall work on obtaining Type 3 IC Team Qualifications at a minimum.
- In the absence of the IC, the Deputy shall have the right/power to accept an assignment on behalf of the team.

Responsibilities - Board of Directors

- Resolve issues that cannot be resolved by the IC or between the team and any other entity.
- Review the operations plan. Make any necessary updates and approve the final plan.

Responsibilities - Team Coordinator (currently Kelsey Pluhar)

- Maintains a list of availability and status of team members between July 1 and September 15.
- The Team Coordinator currently resides at Miles City Interagency Dispatch Center. If not available, one of the other dispatchers at the Miles City dispatch center will fill the team order. In the absence of the Coordinator, specific questions may be directed to Randy Sanders Eastern Land Office Fire Management Officer.

COUNTY ASSIST TEAM

Command/General Staff

Members consist of an Incident Commander, Deputy Incident Commander, Two Operations Chiefs, Planning Chief, Logistics Chief, Finance Chief, Safety Officer, Incident Information Officer, and Liaison officer.

Additional Staff

Sections will be staffed as identified by the Section Chiefs and may include trainees. Coaching and trainee positions will be encouraged by the team and will be negotiated with hosting agency.

How to Request the Team

1. The County Firewarden/Agency calls the Area Fire Program Manager (FMO) to request the CAT.
2. The Area FMO makes a recommendation to the Area Manager/Line Officer.
3. The Area FMO and/or Area Manager/Line Officer calls the FPB Statewide Duty Officer who will access competing needs. The FPB chief/or designee calls the board for consensus when a request is made. If the IC gets an inquiry, they will notify the FPB DO of the potential request. The IC calls Area Manager / Line Officer / Area FMO to discuss the request for assistance.
4. The DNRC Agency Administrator ordering the team should furnish the following information and prepares for the in-briefing:
 - a. Name of incident.
 - b. Incident ORG Center (fire) number.
 - c. Location of incident
 - d. Estimated time of in-briefing as well any other pertinent information.
 - e. Incident Commander may be requested to call the ordering agency.

ALL Hazard Response

The CAT team is sponsored by the Montana DNRC with a majority of the experience with wildland fire. However, the team continues to organize and train for use with other hazards as well. The team is available for response on behalf of local governments as the lead agency for wildfires or hazards associated with dam failures, through the (IC) Incident Commander. The Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (MTDES) is the lead agency for all other hazards; under those circumstances the DNRC is a supporting agency and can be requested through the DES. The mobilization process, ordering of resources, issuance of a finance charge code, identification of a Line Officer/Agency Administrator, and Delegation of Authority, are outlined in the State of Montana Resource Mobilization Plan, which is a supporting document to the Montana Emergency Response Framework.

Developmental/Trainee Positions

The number of additional developmental positions to be filled will be determined by the Incident Commander with the concurrence of the Agency Administrator. A list of available resources will be provided.

The intent of the developmental position is to provide "on-the-job" training and assurance that future qualified personnel will be available to participate on the CAT.

Definitions

Command/General Staff Member - Person who is permanently attached to the CAT and expected to fill that functional position and respond with the CAT when dispatched.

Alternate - Person who is fully qualified in the position held and preferably has held that position on a Type III Team. This person is not permanently attached to the CAT and their availability is on an incident-by-incident basis.

Coached Position - Person needing coaching when they have lost their currency due to time lapse, and they need a dispatch or on-the-job training to bring them up to date.

Developmental/Trainee/Assistant - One who has completed all formal training required for a position but lacks on-the-job experience of performing the duties of that position.

Pre-Order

The CAT Team current pre-order is held by the Team Coordinator at the Miles City Interagency Dispatch Center.

DIRECTORY OF TEAM COORDINATORS

TEAM COORDINATOR-Miles City Dispatch

Kelsey Pluhar—ELO/MCD

Office: 406-233-2917

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Fax: 406-233-2945

kpluhar@mt.gov

Deputy Coordinator

Randy Sanders - FMO/ELO

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OTHER ITEMS FOR FMO/ LOCAL AREA MANAGER & COUNTY COMMISSIONERS TO CONSIDER

- Advise Line Officer of situation and team arrival.
- Briefing for take-over and release of team.
- Complete Incident Situation Assessment.
- Identify possible incident camp location.
- Assign Liaison Officer from the county
- Identify local information contact(s).
- Have maps of incident area available for team.
- Pre-attack Plans, County Fire Management Plans.
- Alert evacuation officials (County DES & Sheriff).
- Identify need for EEO considerations.
- Identify local trainee needs.
- Identify need for Dispatch.
- Logistics local support group if available.
- Fuel source - Logistics function
- Garbage pickup - Logistics function
- Potable water - Logistics function
- Staging/Mob Centers.
- Grey water - Logistics function
- Food source - Logistics function
- Identify Primary Information (PIO) Lead to ensure coordinated information releases.
- Identify finance need—i.e. connectivity with data. LTE data works, or ability to connect hardline by second operational period.

**2024 County Assist Team
Operating Guidelines**

DNRC Eastern Land Office

Area Manager


Chris Pileski

DNRC Northeastern Land Office

Area Manager


Clive Rooney

DNRC Southern Land Office

Area Manager


Joe Holzwarth

DNRC Central Land Office

Area Manager


Hoyt Richards

DNRC Fire Protection Bureau

Chief


Matt Hall

Date 3/22/2024