



Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group

To: National MAC Group

July 7th, 2009

Subject: Geographic Area Level Aviation Management

The PNWCG has reviewed your letter of June 18th regarding an enhanced Operational Risk Assessment for making strategic decisions with a focus on aviation resources. For the last several years, the Northwest MAC Group in concert with the NW Coordination Center has been working to refine the process used to allocate and re-allocate aviation resources to reduce risk and increase efficiency. We support your efforts to partner with us in defining and implementing techniques and protocols that move us closer to fully achieving these objectives. We acknowledge that Operational Risk Management (ORM) practices are most appropriately managed at the local level. Our efforts at the Geographic Area level are intended to guide and more importantly support local actions.

Approaches to Improve Strategic Aviation Resource Management using ORM principles

- 1. “Enhanced” Operational Risk Assessment Training** – A one-day session will be conducted July 16th for aviation managers in the Pacific Northwest. The target audience includes Unit Aviation Officers, Air Operations Branch Directors, and others from PNWCG member organizations. These are the key individuals who are in the best position to employ the principles of ORM in the planning and use of aviation assets. The intent is to elevate the risk assessment process from mitigating risk at a tactical mission level, to applying the ORM process strategically, essentially encouraging aviation managers to ask the question *should we even do the mission?* The session will be developed and conducted by Aviation Managers from the USFS Washington Office Risk Assessment Branch. The session will be supported by members of the PNWCG Aviation Working Team and the Portland National Incident Management Organization (NIMO) Team as well.
- 2. High Risk/Low Frequency Mission Protocols** – Following the ORM session in July, direction will be issued that outlines a deliberate decision making process to be used on large project fires where there is a request for the High Risk/Low Frequency aviation mission. We have experience applying the ORM decision process in the NW with the approval of non-Federally approved airtankers. A few examples of other HR/LF missions that may benefit from a deliberate ORM process may include the utilization of Very Large Airtankers, hoist “standby” or “short haul” requests.

The first set of protocols to be developed and tested (if appropriate) during 2009 will focus on the use of *Type 1 helicopters for troop transport*. The objective is to elevate the

decision process in a structured way so that local Agency Administrators are directly weighing the mission risks and benefits before an operational plan is finalized.

The essence of the process is as follows:

- a. Use of a Type 1 helicopter for movement of personnel is evaluated and planned by the IMT in consultation with the Unit Aviation Officer.
- b. If the Incident Commander concurs with the mission, it will be discussed (along with other tactics/approaches) at a During Incident Review (DIR) between the IC and the Agency Administrator (AA). Concurrence to proceed with the mission will be documented in the Key Decision Log (KDL) or other record-keeping means used by state agencies.
- c. The local AA should have access to a range of subject matter experts, including local and state/regional level Aviation Officers.
- d. The Unit Aviation Officer will notify the NWCC Operations Manager when the decision has been made (by the IC and the AA) to proceed with the use of a Type 1 helicopter for movement of personnel.
- e. The NWCC Operations Manager will notify the Agency Duty Officer or Fire Director and the Chair of the Aviation Working Team.
- f. The Chair of the AWT will confer the appropriate agency and PNWCG officials concerning activation of a STAT or FAST team.
- d. An AAR will be conducted as part of the team closeout with the local unit when this protocol is implemented.

In the fall, a group comprising representatives of the AWT, the IC Council, UAO's and AOBD's will: review the Type 1 helicopter personnel movement protocol, identify adjustments that may be necessary and examine the applicability of the process for other High Risk/Low Frequency aviation missions with high exposure. The group will prepare a report by the end of the year for PNWCG which addresses this issue. The report will include modifications to existing protocols, addition of other mission protocols and recommendations as necessary.

Approaches to Improve Resource Allocation – 2009 Fire Season

- 1. Aviation Resource Allocation Process** – Effective utilization of aviation assets has been a key focus area for a number of years in the collaborative working environment between the Northwest MAC and the Northwest Coordination Center. The MAC Aviation Specialist uses numerous reports and systems to truth aircraft assignments and validate daily usage. In addition a mental model of aviation capability and requested workload is developed by the MAC Aviation Specialist through attendance at GACC briefings and participation on conference calls (e.g. IC/AC conference call, national coordinators conference call, NW dispatch managers conference call, etc.) as well as individual phone conversations with Unit Aviation Officers and incident Air Operations Branch Directors. The focus is on ensuring that aviation assets are safely engaged in the right missions within the Northwest. Situation Awareness is key.

2. **MAC Processes** - The NW MAC will explore modifications to MAC processes to address the allocation of resources to incidents with multiple objectives. In addition, NW MAC will explore the applicability of incorporating the theory of prioritizing “work segments” rather than just filling resource requests on a first-come / first-serve basis. Long Term Implementation Plans will be examined as a potential source of information to assist in the process of partitioning work into 2-5 day segments.

The applicability of using work segments or other workload partitioning techniques in the resource allocation process will be examined in concert with the Incident Commander Council and then discussed with Fire Managers and Agency Administrators.

The Northwest will share lessons learned in the fall and winter. We look forward to working with NMAC and the other Geographic Area’s who are participating in this pilot effort.

/s/ Paul C. Bell
PNWCG Chair