

# Risk – WFDSS – Objectives





## Topic for Discussion

- Findings from fire reviews summer 2014.
- Recommended improvements
- Exercise

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WFDSS and all of its elements was developed to provide Agency Administrators with all of the available relevant information about an emerging wildfire and analytics to assist the Agency Administrator in making a sound decision on how to respond to the wildfire. Clarity of objectives enables the IMT and firefighters on the ground to devise strategies and tactics that aim to achieve the objectives while limiting exposure of firefighters to hazards.

*“We routinely manage landscape-scale multi-million dollar projects using hundreds to thousands of personnel with vague, boilerplate objectives...we can do better”*

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This is a collective challenge among IMTs, Agency Administrators and partners

## Tiering Direction from Strategic To Tactical

- Land Management Plans
  - WFDSS Decision
    - IAP Incident Objectives (ICS 202)
      - Division Assignments (ICS 204)

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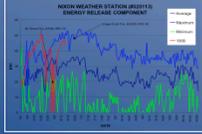
Clear linkages should be evident from higher level long term large-scale strategic decisions to short term localized tactical assignments.

## Firefighter Assignment Context

- When firefighters on a division understand the overall strategy and the context of their assignments in achieving that strategy they are better able to adapt and improvise as conditions change to continue making progress towards achieving the overall strategy while limiting their exposure to hazards.

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## Objectives Project

- 24 Fires reviewed in 2014 (PSW, PNW, R1).
- All Incident Objectives and Incident Requirements in WFDSS database as of May 2014.

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Findings

- More than 90 percent of incident objectives are generic, referring to...
  - policy – “full suppression”

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These kind of objectives do not add value...they provide little meaningful direction to IMTs



## Findings

- More than 90 percent of incident objectives are generic, referring to...
  - policy – “full suppression”
  - **Doctrinal – “keep costs commensurate with values at risk” “adhere to LCES”**

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## Findings

- More than 90 percent of incident objectives are generic, referring to...
  - policy – “full suppression”
  - Doctrinal – “keep costs commensurate with values at risk”  
“adhere to LCES”
  - **Core Values – “firefighter safety is the number 1 priority”**

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This “generic” objective is important and should be the first one listed for any decision (either the wording here or some other statement indicating firefighter safety is the most important objective). However, there is no need to add additional statements in the objectives section listing LCES, Ten Standard Firefighting Orders, Eighteen Situations That Shout Watch Out, etc. All subsequent objectives and the course of action should be developed with the first, highest priority objective in mind.



## Findings

- More than 90 percent of incident objectives are generic, referring to...
  - policy – “full suppression”
  - Doctrinal – “keep costs commensurate with values at risk”  
“adhere to LCES”
  - Core Values – “firefighter safety is the number 1 priority”
  - **Vague Terms – “keep the fire small”**

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Keep the fire small is a very common objective in previous WFDSS decisions. This provides little meaningful direction to an IMT. One should rather identify protection objectives on all sides of the fire with some sense of their priority/importance.



## Findings

- The lack of specificity of objectives makes it challenging to understand the relative importance of one objective to another and how to be fully successful in achieving the objective

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This leads to potential mismanagement of resources based on unclear priorities, jeopardizing a sound risk management process that may expose firefighters to hazards needlessly.



## Examples

- Keep the fire south of Wolf Ridge
  - Underlying objective: *protect pine plantations north of the Wolf Ridge*

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The bullet is an objective from a past WFDSS decision.  
The italicized objective below it is a recommended improvement which addresses the “why” question.



## Examples

- Keep the fire east of Clearwater Reservoir
  - Underlying objective: *protect the Ft Collins municipal watershed*

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The bullet is an objective from a past WFDSS decision.  
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## Findings

- When wildfire response assets are limited, AAs and IMTs must choose which objectives they have capacity to achieve.

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Beyond protecting life (civilian and FF) everything else is second priority and by virtue of all those "second priorities" being such, they sometimes get lumped into an incoherent mass. (Keeping the fire out of the Ft Collins municipal watershed likely is more important than protecting a pine plantation on the Arapaho-Roosevelt NF, yet they may be listed as though they have equal importance.)



## Findings

- When wildfire response assets are not limited, IMTs may expose firefighters to hazards unnecessarily when objectives and their relative importance are not clearly defined and understood.

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Example: objective states “minimize fire size” while the underlying the protection objective is a small community 3 miles to the north. The community has completed a network of fuel treatments on strategic topography between the current fire and the first homes. Because the objective is “minimize fire size” the IMT tries to stop the fire on unfavorable terrain and fuels (much closer to current perimeter) than using the fuel breaks to stop the fire.



## Findings

- In some cases IMTs are not even reading the WFDSS decision.

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This may be due poorly written decisions.



## Findings

- Incident Objectives and Requirements and other agency administrator direction often differ and sometimes conflict between the WFDSS decision, delegation of authority, the inbriefing, other documents and ad hoc discussions.

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This misalignment sometimes results in unnecessary firefighter exposure when an IMT takes on tasks which are not in alignment with true leader's intent. On one complex of fires last year an IMT had more than 30 personnel assigned to perimeter control of a fire for several days that the Forest Supervisor had indicated in the WFDSS decision could be monitored



## Findings

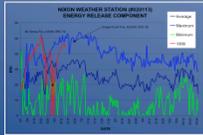
- The tie from Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) strategic objectives and management requirements to incident objectives, incident requirements, and the course of action was often unclear and inconsistent.

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These inconsistencies lead to delegations of authority and briefing packages that are inconsistent or do not provide adequate agency administrator intent.

# Findings

- In many cases the rationale did not provide an overview of this information or why the decision was made.



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## Findings

- In most cases there were not clear linkages from the WFDSS decision to the objectives in the IAP and the tasks identified in the 204s

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When these linkages are not present firefighters have an incomplete understanding of the context of their assignments and how to be effective in improvising when the initial daily plan needs revision. Is it more important to try to “stop the fire south of Wolf Ridge, or fall back and implement point protection on the electronic site north of Wolf Ridge”



## Recommendation

- **Improve specificity of objectives and requirements – what, when, where, why**

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SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely



## Recommendation

- Improve specificity of objectives and requirements – what, when, where, why
- **Use SMART objectives to the extent possible**

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SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely



## Examples

Minimize economic impacts to communities.

*Insofar as safely possible, keep FS Road 4422 open to the public for access to Hiawatha Lake and the recreation-based businesses there through Labor Day weekend*

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The bullet is an objective from a past WFDSS decision.  
The italicized objective below it is a recommended improvement which addresses the “why” question.



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## Vague Objective

Minimize the size of the fire.

*Keep the fire from entering the Rough River drainage to avoid long duration, costly, and hazardous fire operations.*

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## Uncertain Objectives

No explanation of "WHY"

- Keep fire south of Bear Ridge.
- Keep fire east of Red River.
- Keep fire north of Blue Lake.
- *Keep Fire west of Highway 37.*

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## Improved Objectives

- Keep fire south of Bear Ridge.
- *Protect high value pine plantations north of Bear Ridge from moderate to high severity fire.*

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The bullet is an objective from a past WFDSS decision.  
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## Improved Objectives

- Keep fire east of Red River.
- *Protect the high wattage power transmission line that lies on the west side of Red River until arrangements can be made to de-energize the line.*

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## Improved Objectives

- Keep fire north of Blue Lake.
- *Protect marten habitat south of Blue Lake from moderate to high severity fire.*

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The bullet is an objective from a past WFDSS decision.  
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## Improved Objectives

- Keep Fire west of Highway 37.
- *Protect residences and infrastructure along and to the east of Highway 37.*

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## Recommendation

IMTs need to engage Agency Administrators in a dialog about the objectives and ensure they are sufficiently specific, realistic and aligned with other direction. Again, they should address “what where and why” questions

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Oftentimes IMTs have capacity to assist Agency Administrators in crafting good objectives that tier to the LRMP strategic objectives and clearly convey leader’s intent.



Be careful of unintended outcomes when objectives are written clearly for the current situation.



## Recommendation

Some IMTs need to be more diligent in developing ICS 202 objectives that are tiered to the WFDSS incident objectives and then develop ICS 204 assignments that are clearly linked to the higher level objectives

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I was told by one Planning Section Chief that their team uses the same objectives for of their fires. Engaging in this effort should improve overall understanding of objectives, constraints and opportunities for all parties engaged in the management of a fire – from IC down to the pulaski swingers. We hope that this will lead to reducing unnecessary firefighter exposure to hazards and enhanced ability to improvise effectively in achieving objectives.

# Recommendations

- Improve linkages between incident objectives, incident requirements, course of action and rationale.

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There is a need to improve the linkages between incident objectives, incident requirements, course of action and rationale. Incident objectives and incident requirements must be tiered to LRMPs. The Course of Action must be devised to meet the incident objectives and the Rationale must provide a clear explanation of how these elements of the decision link together and why the specific course of action provides the best means of achieving the objectives.

## Agency Administrator Limitations

- Especially in multiple fire situations, AAs often cannot develop a Delegation of Authority, Inbriefing package and a quality WFDSS decision before the IMT arrives....even though many of the elements of these efforts are the same.
- **Oftentimes this results in misalignment of direction among these guiding documents and presentations**

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## Recommendations

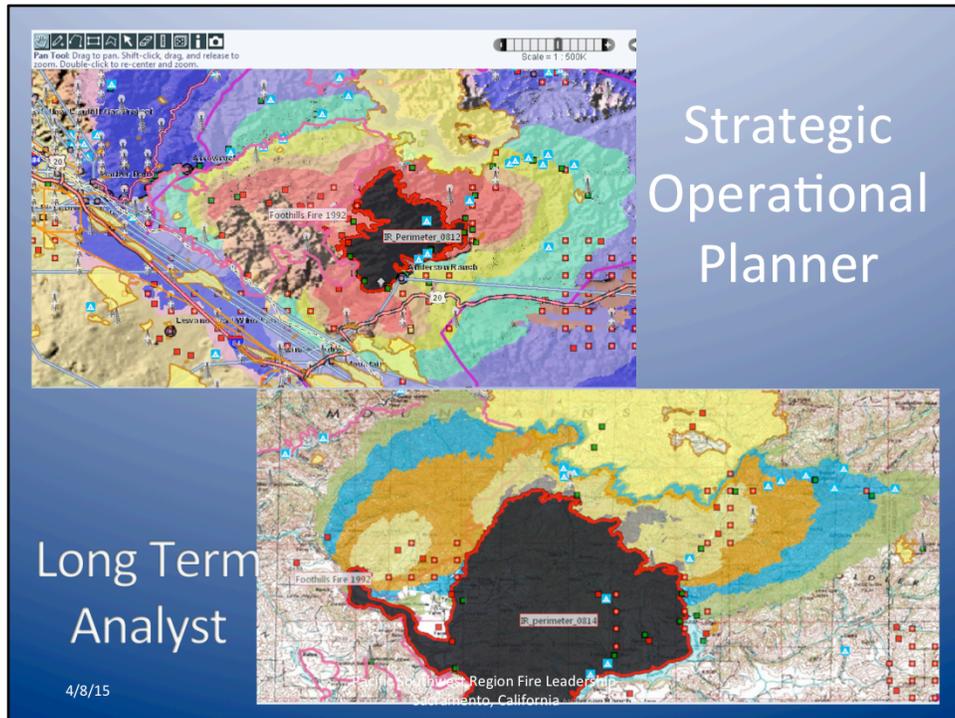
- Streamline transitions documents to ensure incident objectives and requirements are delivered and leader's intent is understood.
- Agency administrators, IMTs and fire personnel must align their understanding of priorities for the fire.

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There is a need to streamline team transition documents to ensure incident objectives and requirements are delivered in a consistent manner. Strategic objectives and management requirements not applicable to fire incidents should be eliminated from decisions for those incidents. The result will be better risk management.

Agency Administrators, Incident Commanders, and fire personnel should be aligned in their understanding of priorities for the incident. A sense of priorities for objectives should be conveyed in the course of action and should also be described in the rationale.



Utilizing a long term analyst or strategic operation planner to help evaluate the risks and benefits will help ensure that as much information as possible is considered and increases the potential of looking at the whole picture. Products that they can support not only helps managers look beyond their “known” but can expand the realm of possibilities for consideration. In other words the models may show fire potential differently than local experts might consider, or may be utilized to assist in informing the public of potential outcomes to garner support for the decisions.

# References

**Decision Making for Wildfire Incidents:  
A Reference Guide for Applying the Risk  
Management Process at the Incident  
Level** RMRS-GTR-298



**Line Officer's Desk Reference For  
Fire Management Program**



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There are many great references to help people understand both the decision making process and WFDSS. The Decision Making GTR was referenced earlier and was written to help people understand the decision making process, rather than the WFDSS process. The Line Officer's Desk Reference has been developed for Forest Service Line officers to provide them with one place to find fire related information.

The Wildland Fire Management RD&A is setting up a location on their website, working with the FS National Line Officer's Team, to host information in one place for Line Officers. Although the FS Line Officer's Desk Reference is hosted here, there are many other documents of interest to interagency Line Officers available here too.



# For Additional Information

**Wildland Fire Management  
RD&A**

**<http://www.wfmrda.nwccg.gov/>**

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