



# USDA Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management Briefing Paper

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Date: July 14, 2014

**Topic:** Forest Service Re-engagement of Evolving Incident Management

**Issue:** Recently a group comprised of line officers from the National Line Officer Team (NLOT), Regional Fire Directors, and key Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) staff at the Regional and Washington Office met to discuss Forest Service re-engagement of Evolving Incident Management (EIM). The meeting was convened to address specific questions and concerns that have arisen from EIM implementation, assist with updating and briefing agency leadership, and provide feedback to direct how EIM will be implemented in the future.

The intent of this group is not to duplicate efforts of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) or the EIM Task Team, rather it is to facilitate an agency “re-engagement” and deeper understanding of the EIM goals and recommendations, possible downstream effects of EIM implementation, and develop options to ensure that the end state of EIM is in alignment with Forest Service goals and objectives.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide leadership with an update on the current status of EIM implementation.

**Background:** Since February 2014 implementation of Evolving Incident Management (EIM) has been the subject of many discussions among agency leaders at the national and geographic area coordinating group levels. Forest Service regional fire leadership summarized a number of concerns in a briefing paper to the Senior Fire Leader Council (SFLC) and recommended that implementation of EIM be suspended or redirected until these concerns could be addressed. The SFLC concurred with this request.

In May 2014 NWCG received a memo from the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) identifying their concerns with some of the EIM recommendations but support for efforts that addressed workforce development, creating efficiencies for how IMTs are managed, and increasing capacity to support IMTs. The items identified by NASF are closely aligned with the concerns expressed by Forest Service leadership. The Department of Interior (DOI) leadership also concurred with the Forest Service and NASF assessments of the situation.

In May 2014 the Fire Executive Council (FEC) issued a memo of direction to the Fire Management Board (FMB) to conduct a review to validate the EIM case for change, consider if there are any new insights or changes that should be considered, and provide recommendations for addressing identified problems and concerns. The FEC memo also indicated support for activities that address the workforce management problems highlighted in the original EIM case for change, and efforts should be continued as these problems have existed since the late 1990's (see 2000 Jacob's Report). However activities that foreclose management options need to be suspended in 2014 in order to preserve the prerogative of the affected agency leadership to make final decisions.

**Forest Service Re-engagement:** The Forest Service Re-engagement Group met on July 9, 2014 in Boise to discuss current implementation status, gather situational awareness of current issues and concerns, evaluate how EIM implementation will affect the agency, and provide recommendations and options to the SFLC.

Some common themes identified include the following:

- **Agency administrators** have a key role in building IMT capacity and improving opportunities for individuals and IMTs to gain experience. Agency administrators who support emergency response need support from Regional and Washington Offices when that support results in failure to meet targets on other projects. There are varying degrees of support from line officers and supervisors to support IMT participation, and the policies and practices for IMT participation need high level attention in order to ensure consistency and equity.
- **Increasing speed to certification** has high value. Current development pathways can and should be streamlined to remove redundancies and bottlenecks.
- **Recruitment and development** effort needs to be systematically addressed as opposed to relying solely on voluntary participation.
- **Administratively Determined (AD) employees** who are retired agency personnel will continue to be an important part of the solution to increasing the sustainability of IMTs by filling vacant positions that cannot be filled by agency personnel as well as imparting their experience on trainees. However, the stance on how ADs are used needs to be clarified.
- **The number of cooperators on IMTs** from local government or municipal fire departments is trending towards equaling or out-numbering federal team members. The approach to prioritizing cooperators during IMT selection or training is not consistent among geographic areas. Pros and cons of this trend need consideration.
- **Team rotations** can be improved to ensure better utilization and balanced experience of all teams. Exposing IMTs on a more regular basis to a variety of geographic areas, fuel types, and situations will help decrease risk transference by building confidence in the competency of all IMTs.
- **Incentives** to encourage employees to participate on IMTs and advance in the organization need to be identified and utilized. Other barriers or disincentives are also present and need to be addressed.
- **Communications from the EIM working group** need to be multi-faceted, frequent, and reach a variety of audiences. Correct audiences should be targeted when gathering feedback. Progress updates need to reach all levels.

There was consensus among the group that much of the workforce management issues being evaluated by EIM are consistent with concerns the agency shares and needs to continue. Of note, many of these issues were also highlighted in the Office of Inspector General (OIG) 2008 audit of the Forest Service wildland firefighting succession capabilities. There was also consensus that the assessment of EIM recommendations identified in the May 27, 2014 NASF memo are in alignment with Forest Service concerns and agreement that work on some of the EIM recommendations should be suspended or redirected, but recommendations intended to address workforce management concerns and increasing capacity should continue.

The group identified some preliminary recommendations:

1. Move forward with implementing the EIM workforce management recommendations supported by the NASF Fire Committee and Fire Executive Council in memos dated May 27, 2014 and May 30, 2014.

2. Reconsider the controversial recommendations and provide alternatives to the following EIM recommendations:
  - a) Recommendation that we will only have one type of IMT and all IMTs will be Type 1.
  - b) Recommendation to eliminate Type 2 IMT qualifications and transition Type 2 IMTs to the Type 1 level.
  - c) Recommendation to scale down the number of IMTs to 40.
  - d) Recommendation that the NICC will manage all IMT rotation and mobilization at Planning Level 3 and higher.
3. Continue to coordinate efforts with the Geographic Area Coordinating Groups (GACG) to analyze the minimum number of IMTs each GA needs and can be supported by the partner agencies. Use this data to develop a range of options for establishing IMT targets at the geographical and national levels. Request each GA develop recommendations and implement measures to sustain the identified number of IMTs in their GA.

**The Path Forward:** As agreed to by the group, follow-up of the meeting to capture common themes, evaluation of key considerations, and development of additional options for the controversial EIM recommendations will be documented and communicated. The group is intending to meet again in September 2014 to compile deliverables for a report out to the SFLC meeting in October 2014. The effort by the Forest Service group will be coordinated through the NWCG EIM Task Team and FS representatives to FMB to include the interagency perspective and re-evaluation of EIM in a report out to the Fire Executive Council in the fall of 2014.

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