



NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

NWCG Letter 26-001

January 20, 2026

Re: 2026 NWCG Executive Board Annual Letter

It is clear that 2025 was another significant year for the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). Everything we have accomplished — and will continue to accomplish — is only possible with the many dedicated and talented committee and staff members who contribute towards our collective mission. As we list the more significant accomplishments, we do so with appreciation for all those who contributed. As the members of the NWCG Executive Board (EB), we are honored to share this 2026 Annual Letter.

Significant Accomplishments and Milestones in 2025

Incident Performance and Training Modernization (IPTM) Effort: The IPTM project team made substantial progress towards developing a modern, integrated performance-based training system designed to strengthen a safe and effective wildland fire workforce. The project is 40% complete, with critical foundational components already in place. Additional positions launching in spring 2026 will further implementation and enhance interagency preparedness.

Complex Incident Management (CIM) Support: Support for CIM courses remains strong. The S-320, Introduction to Incident Management Teams course achieved full certification in 2025 and is now available for delivery in the field. The Incident Management Team Course Steering Committee also initiated the revision of S-420 and hosted the first alpha test course in December 2025 — an important step toward modernizing the CIM training pathway. In addition, the archiving of Type 1 and 2 Command & General Staff positions for 2026 marks a major milestone in CIM implementation.

NWCG Committee Reorganization: NWCG launched a major effort to restructure and streamline committee operations to better align with its core interagency mission. This reorganization is intended to strengthen collaboration across agencies while addressing rising operational demands and system complexities. The effort is expected to improve interagency coordination, increase system efficiency, and reduce overall workload. The full implementation target date is July 1, 2026.

Incident Response Pocket Guide: NWCG published the 2025 edition of its most widely used field reference — the *NWCG Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG)*, PMS 461 — and distributed more than 300,000 copies across the wildland fire community.

Incident Management Team Association: NWCG welcomed the Incident Management Team Association (IMTA) as its newest associate member. IMTA is a professional organization dedicated to advancing the incident management discipline by promoting standards and strengthening collaboration among federal, state, local, Tribal, and private-sector partners across all phases of incident management.

Rapid Extraction Module Support (REMS): NWCG released the *NWCG Standards for Rapid Extraction Module Support*, PMS 552 — which defines roles, responsibilities, qualifications, and equipment requirements for REMS teams. These standards enhance firefighter safety by ensuring that strategically deployed REMS resources can provide rapid access, safe egress, and efficient transport of injured or ill personnel to definitive medical care during wildland fire incidents.

Safety Warnings and Equipment Bulletins: NWCG issued multiple Safety Warning and Equipment Bulletins to alert the wildland fire community to time-sensitive hazards. Key topics included non-specification fire shelters, aquatic invasive species, proper laundering practices, degradation of pre-2006 fire shelters, and decontamination of wildland fire clothing.

Other Highlights: Our committee and subgroup members have worked hard over the past year on numerous accomplishments, including communicating the discontinuation of the Haines Index and Lightning Activity Level; developing alternate pathways to the Incident Commander Complex (ICCI) position; closing out the Big Swamp/Rum Creek corrective action taskings; developing standardized off-highway vehicle (OHV) resource typing; coordinating Buying Team protocols; ensuring successful Week of Remembrance and Suicide Prevention Month events; coordinating firefighter fatigue solutions; and updating/developing numerous publications, forms, and training courses.

EB Membership Changes in 2025

The past year we witnessed several changes in the EB membership. We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation for the significant service and contributions of:

- Erin Horsburgh (National Park Service)
- Jon Wallace (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
- Kim Van Hemelryck (Office of Wildland Fire)

We also want to extend a warm welcome to our newer EB members and thank them for their commitment to being a part of our team:

- Casey Teske (National Park Service)
- Eric Fransted (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
- Annie Benoit (Office of Wildland Fire)
- Mike Rubenstein (Incident Management Teams Association)

2026 Priorities

In 2026, our highest priority will remain the mental and physical wellbeing of our responders and workforce. Every decision we make, and every advancement we contemplate, will be grounded in this commitment.

Our key functional priorities are to complete the restructuring so that NWCG is well-positioned to meet future challenges and to ensure the continued success of IPTM. This includes advancing the committee structure reorganization, revitalizing and reaffirming the EB and its operating procedures, supporting the Department of the Interior's and U.S. Forest Service's alignment, and ensuring adequate resourcing for continued IPTM progress. With a redesigned and recommitted organization, we will be better equipped to take on complex projects and proactively identify and address emerging challenges and opportunities.

Please accept our sincere gratitude to committees, staff, and members of our organization who help support this work. Our collaborative efforts are crucial to safe, effective wildland fire management and we look forward to what we will accomplish together.

With much appreciation,

Erik Litzenberg, International Association of Fire Chiefs, Chair

Anne Jewell, Department of War, Vice-Chair

Brain Achziger, Bureau of Land Management

Aitor Bidaburu, United States Fire Administration

Jim Durglo, Intertribal Timber Council

Garth Fisher, Bureau of Indian Affairs

Casey Teske, National Park Service

Heath Cota, USDA Forest Service

Greg Smith, National Association of State Foresters

Eric Fransted, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Annie Benoit, Office of Wildland Fire (Associate Member)

Heath Hockenberry, National Weather Service (Associate Member)

Parmial Kopardekar, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Associate Member)

Mike Rubenstein, Incident Management Teams Association (Associate Member)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "EL J SL".

Erik Litzenberg, NWCG Executive Board Chair