

NWCG LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting Minutes

December 8-11, 2025 • Ventura, California

Agency Representatives Present: Mike Ellsworth, Chair (FWS); TJ Gholson, Vice-Chair (BIA); Maeve Juarez (Montecito Fire Department/local government rep); George Risko - *Virtual* (Florida Forest Service/NASF rep); (Tess McCarville (USFS), Richard Putnam - *Virtual* (BLM); Russ Babiak (NPS)

Ad Hoc: LJ Brown (BLM); Chris Ayer (Corona De Tuson Fire Department); Ross Fielder - *Virtual* (USFS); Ted Adams (USFS); Justin Vernon (USFS); Joe Williams (USFS); Jaimie Ollie - *Virtual* (USFS); Elliot Herrera - *Virtual* (BLM); Koreena Manthei - *Virtual* (USFS); Jamie Strelnik (USFS); Paul Cerda -*Virtual* (NPS); Gabe Mason (USFS); Brian Sebastian (USFS); Lindsey Kupfer - *Virtual* (USFS); Ashleigh D'Antonio (USFWS), Jeremy Bennet (BIA), Anthony Escobar (retired); Danial Dobyn (BLM); Megan Gunther (BLM); Nick Terrell (BLM); Rick Gividen (OWF); Willie Knudsen - *Virtual* (NPS); Alexis Waldron (USFS)

Special Guests: Chief Brian Fenessy (USWFS/OCFA); Chief Kazuo Todd (Hawaii Fire Department); Michael Walker (Hawaii Department of Natural Resource); Chief Chad Cook (Ventura County Fire Department); Travis Touchette (Lessons Learned Center); Mark Gerwe (USFS); Tony Achumente (Ventura County Fire Department); Trevor Johnson (Ventura County Fire Department); Matt Aoke (USFS)

DAY ONE – Monday

- CMUL and Continuing Education workshop

DAY TWO - Tuesday

Introduction & Welcome (Mike Ellsworth, Chief Mark Gerwe US. Forest Service – Los Padres National Forest, Chief Chad Cook Ventura Fire Department)

- Welcoming statements from committee chair Mike Ellsworth
- Introduction of participants
- Chief Mark Gerwe remarks
 - Key relationships with contract counties including with Ventura Fire Department which can be attributed to leadership basis
 - Overview of Chief's career and the intersection points of leadership
 - "Be a leader someone wants to work for"
 - "Mind your influences"
- Chief Chad Cook remarks
 - Doesn't look at himself as a leader, but as a developer
 - How do we put people in positions that lead to succeed
 - Ventura County Fire Department covers federal, state, private lands working with service-first mindset – whoever is closest to incident responds
 - This hinges on positive partnerships and relationships
 - You don't want to get to know people on an emergency
 - "Culture will eat management for lunch every time."
 - In response to how we can rethink our outreach efforts – if you are feeling stagnant – then you need to change
 - Be thinking 5-15 years in the future
 - The upcoming generation is inundated with information – reach them through succinct videos / information snippets rather than extensive classroom time
 - Start with small teams and ensure that everyone is providing consistent messages
 - Being a developer is challenging – more difficult conversations than positive ones

- When setting up meetings with people – look at whether it’s an emotional discussion, the person needs assistance, or if they need guidance
- People today judge us through the service we delivery
- Always build a culture that aligns with the vision

Future of Leadership Development (Chief Brian Fennessy)

- Reflections on Chief’s time with the Leadership Committee
- Moving into the role as the chief of the U.S. Wildland Fire Service in January
 - Contacted by Senator Sheehy from Montana last winter to gauge Fennessy’s support for vision of shared fire organization
 - Draft executive order mentioned putting a taskforce together of state/local resources. Chief was asked to lead advisory group.
 - September 12 - the DOI Secretary issued Secretary Order for operational plan for January 12, 2026, start date of U.S WFS
 - Chief Fennessy will report directly to DOI Secretary
 - His main priority – “I work for the firefighters first.”
 - If we’re creating a fire organization, firefighters must report to firefighters
 - Still have positive working relationship with land managers, but different
 - Still do fuels mitigation work, but as partners
 - Leadership and workforce development needs to remain a top priority for USWFS
- Where does the Committee see the future with the U.S. Wildland Fire Service / what is the future of leadership development?
 - Ellsworth– Look to Chief to continue to promote leadership development and workforce development efforts and to provide the needed workforce and resources to achieve it
 - What will it look like if there’s only one DOI rep for committees – how do we ensure the multiple perspectives and the robust conversations are still had vs a single person? We will have to be mindful and seek those conversations differently.
 - One big leadership challenge will be to bring cultures of different agencies together into a whole new agency under a common vision.
 - Chief – can bring folks together under common purpose, but need to respect agencies’ cultures
 - Chief – Workforce development / health & wellness need to be prioritized at the highest level
 - D’Antonio– When it’s called a “suppression organization” this causes a lot of anxiety around relationships and the work that is being done through prescribed burning, habitat restoration, etc. that isn’t suppression
 - Chief: Anything that contributes to good work on landscape should continue or increase
 - Babiak – Concern is with as we disconnect with the land management side of the house how do we maintain as strong connect with the agency and the land. How do we ensure the agency land managers are at each other’s table.
 - Chief: Agree, we must focus on the relationship to be successful
- Chief plans to be an advocate for all firefighters

NWCG Reorganization & Updates (Erica Lamb)

- NWCG reorganization plan approved by the executive board in September
 - Intent is to return to interagency operability
 - Decrease duplication and clarify roles
- Changes:
 - Committees – 17 parent committees will become 10 management committees with 4 subcommittees each.
 - Committees will reflect into more of an ICS frameworks

- Focus on oversight and alignment with executive boards
 - Subcommittees will be more tactical in nature
 - 1 representative for primary agencies (some nuance) – clarify who should be voting
 - Clear workload management – align work with NWCG’s mission of interoperable standards
 - Create workplan for committees to ensure other parts of NWCG can support
 - To ensure standards are modern and current, a mandatory review cycle for publications over 10 years old
 - Prioritize changes to training and courses
- Implementation – July 1, 2026
 - NWCG member agencies are identifying who they want to represent them
- Continue to have all-chairs committee meeting in February
- **Questions:**
 - Is there room to change “Leadership Training” to “Leadership Education” to ensure we’re encompassing more than formal opportunities?
 - Erica can make recommendation to executive board if we have consensus
 - Can you speak to potential for single DOI representative?
 - Intent would be to have one DOI representative recognizing there may be need for SMEs
 - Ellsworth doesn’t see the reorganization and representation changing our committee as people still have representation in other aspects/programs of committee
- Ellsworth provided overview of subgroups within committee under the new alignment
- We need to focus on finding our replacements
 - What is our 5–10-year plan?
 - Need to bring in younger folks who can add value to work groups
- The biggest strength is being able to get folks in the room – we need to bring new folks to our meetings
- Is it fair to ask people to join when they will run into barriers?
 - It does seem to be working. This is the biggest meeting we’ve had in a while.
 - Momentum was lost during covid but seems like we’re regaining energy and purpose.

CMUL Report Out (TJ Gholston)

- General overview of CMUL program

L-180 (Ashley D’Anotonio)

Action Items

D’Anotonio	Transition with Meghann on past L-180 efforts. Consider the IHC Training working group for assistance
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Discussion:

- Working group still needs to make updates to the course
- Working group updated unit objectives that need some revision

L-280 (Ashley D’Anotonio)

Action Items

N/A	
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Discussion:

- Course edits have gone live (October)
- IPSC approved L-280 as requirement for all single resource bosses (other than L-180, only NWCG-required course)

L-380 (Joe Williams)

Action Items

Williams	Need to finalize L380 package and bring to Exec Board to begin integrating within NWCG publication and website
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Discussion:

- Put together working group to review design criteria components
- Look into using the checklist they've developed for other L-course reviews
- Sebastian pulled together an off-the-shelf product with unit mapping to focus on desired outcomes
- Agency reps have reviewed and approved current curriculum changes
 - Working on getting approval through NWCG
 - Ellsworth is developing letter to accompany official update to GATR and current vendors
 - Working on updating links, etc. on website
- What's the process for approving new lead instructors?
 - Proximity GATR can approve
 - CMUL lead can approve if there isn't a GATR

L-381 (LJ Brown)**Action Items**

Brown	Develop a plan to redesign the Design Criteria
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Discussion:

- In communication with a new provider for course evaluation as soon as January
- Long term – look at the same review process that L-380 completed

L-580 (Maeve Juarez)

D'Anotonio	Share pool of facilitators with Maeve
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Discussion:

- Working on some housekeeping pieces
- With addition of new offerings, there is a lot to keep moving and track
- Need to identify roles & responsibilities / traits of conference group leader
 - Some lessons learned this year highlighted need
- CMULs will meet monthly, virtually – 3rd Tuesday of every month @1300
- CMUL will be prioritizing efforts –
 - L380: finalize package to move to NWCG publications
 - L-381: redesign and the new vendor
 - L480: continue to explore alternatives.

Consider as we build programs and trainings that we are cognizant of what depth we are pulling from to deliver products

- If we can't provide the quality of training that our leadership expects, we may need to reconsider what we're offering
- We need to be considerate that we're all yes people – how do we say yes and ensure quality
- Could we start to attach training/education development to individual development plans?
 - Ask the individual “What are you doing to develop yourself AND what are you doing to develop others?”
 - If it is supported by immediate supervision, it is a limited commitment to a focused area and it comes with dedicated funds (will require doubling each employee's individual training budget and time dedicated).
- Consider consolidating training into a fully built out center (structure world has national training academy – allows delivery to be a bit more affordable to units sending students)
- Is the need for us to develop an elevator speech on how we talk about education for an elevator speech?

Action Items

Babiak	Develop a common bullet point for committee to discuss with management
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Eaton Fire Presentation (Oscar Vargas)

- Tabletop exercise for multi-jurisdictional fire response
- When heading to an incident always think about – communications, accountability, unification
- January 2025 Fire Season
 - Leadership / Command
 - Priorities
 - Information / Intel
 - Transition
- Conditions – several wildfires across the greater Los Angeles area during a short time span
- Leadership
 - You're rarely alone – you're not making these decisions alone
 - Give firefighters the freedom to operate and make the best decisions they need to
 - What can you control?
 - Your leadership reaches all the way down every firefighter on the ground
 - Command / leadership during chaos is challenging
 - Unification is key – ICP, ordering, objectives, messaging, communications, cost
 - Unified command from initial to extended attack
 - Need to determine who is in charge when you have multiple incident commanders
 - Consider who is engaging with elected officials
 - Best Practices –
 - Clearly identify incident commanders from each agency
 - Establish concise and simple objectives
 - Assigned functional roles to each ICs
 - Unified messaging for media or evacuations
 - Manage/mitigate various levels of leadership
 - Leadership at incident level
 - Leadership - agency / local / state / federal levels
 - Leverage technology
- Priorities During Chaos
 - Ensure everyone is on the same page
- Information / Intel
 - Keep it short, concise, to the point
 - Limited or no intel will create major information gaps
 - Joint messaging, evacuations, and information releases are critical
 - Social media is complex additional input that can fuel rumors and misinformation
- Transitions
 - Transitions will make it worse, make it better, or keep the same
 - Incoming IMTs must be willing to adapt their “process”
 - It's crucial to be able to pick up a plan vs. start a new one
 - Friction comes from transition and inability to adapt
- Leadership Lessons Learned
 - Preexisting relationships are an investment to succeed
 - Adaptability is the #1 survival strategy / tactic
 - Build a team
 - Establish a “process” to manage chaos
- Questions

- How does being an IA IC influence your work as a team IC?
 - Establish an initial leadership moment – what are we doing, where are we going
- How do you coordinate with local partner agencies?
 - Have regular meetings to coordinate
 - Opportunities for AAR and collective processing following January fires
 - Challenging to have family / friends evacuating / asking for help while trying to respond
- The committee is looking at refreshing vignettes in “Leading in the Wildland Fire Service” – will look to include some of Oscar’s experience.

Continuing Education Working Group (Ted Adams)

Action Items

Everyone	Provide ideas for small leadership snippets that the group can build upon
Everyone	Provide names and POCs for potential people to interview as part of “Leaders We’d Like to Meet”
Justin	Look into pulling together short video on how Diamond Mountain is using PRP
Everyone	Take a look at Level 1 campaign format and share inputs for upcoming leadership levels

Discussion:

- Background – We’ve had lots of projects that folks have been spearheading as different programs
 - Last fall, the committee decided to bring everyone together to increase capacity and support
- Yesterday’s working group – put together Parts 2 /3 of the recent leadership campaign
- Had some discussion on what the small snacks are that the group wants to chase?
 - Digestible, small pockets of learning
- Leaders We’d Like to Meet
 - Conducted an interview with Alex Robertson (Deputy Fire Director USFS) before he retired
 - Looking for additional folks to interview
- Revisit leadership lessons on the portal
- How do we create a curated library of lessons, videos, podcasts, etc.
- Professional Reading Program (Justin Vernon)
 - Approach has been 4-6 books each year with discussion guides
 - 2025 is the tenth year of program
 - 2025 – a number of folks contributed to products which helps keep the field connection and voice
 - 2026 – should be ready to go live on the website in January
 - Feedback form on the website has been hit or miss
 - Website analytics – varying interest in books
 - NWCG Mail Chimp continues to be great way to get information out
 - Looking at ways to leverage Portal for shorter lessons
 - AI video – videos on why book is important and how it relates to wildland fire
 - Continue to steward program until he can find someone interested in folding in and starting to take on organization
 - Leverage connections with hotshot community
 - Would like to create video with Diamond Mountain to highlight how they’re using program
 - Tough to ask people to develop themselves outside of the season
 - What are the digital venues where people can engage with each other?
 - How do we make sure we stay relevant, particularly through these next few years
- Campaign (Ted Adams)
 - Campaign is structured over 15-month period broken into each of the leadership topics with 3-month sections on each leadership level
 - How do we leverage leadership attributes and inclination for learning with those that are coming into wildland firefighting community?

- Sometimes tracking mechanisms can help motivate people – is there a way to represent with continuing education style credits
 - Legitimizes the effort folks put into program
- How do we fill gaps missing in training offerings?
 - We need people to move up into middle leader positions faster than ever before due to gaps in staffing
- Can we create workshops that can be delivered locally and across the country that include opportunity for facilitated work groups, dialogue, presentations, etc.
 - What topics would people want to see?
- What opportunities do we have for virtual staff ride offerings?
 - Gives more people the opportunity to have the learning experience and share the lessons
- Leadership in Media
 - Pulled together Ted Lasso Season 1 discussion guide is out
 - Opportunities to pull together others
 - Got a submission – pulling together a second discussion guide
 - What does success look like for products?
 - Producing one discussion guide per year
 - Opportunities in the Portal to ask for contributions to book / movie recommendations
- Leadership Snacks
 - Continue to see activity in the Portal
 - Trying to embody the quote “Learn from other mistakes because you’re not going to learn long enough to make them all.”
 - How are we capturing successes, failures, celebrations to share with others?
 - What lessons do you have that could be shared?
 - If you’re leading in an organization, what are the lessons you wish you’d known?

Ad Hoc Topics

Lead By Example

- How do we provide this award moving forward?
- Are there opportunities to partner with the U.S. Hotshot Association as there are significant hurdles with Federal agencies covering cost?

DAY THREE – Wednesday

After Math of the Hawaii Fires: Organizational Lessons Learned (Chief Kazuo)

- Overview of Hawaiian fire organizations
- Ka’ala Fire (2025) – 520 acres
 - Big Island
 - Two months on scene
 - Access challenges – off-road access for water delivery
 - Fire can travel underground and last for months
- Mana Road Fire (2021)
 - 4 communities evacuated
 - 1,700+ acres
- Mana Road area (2025)
 - 3 fires in this area, which is currently in D3 drought
 - 7 miles of unpaved road to access
 - No water
 - Some caused by drought, others by arson
 - 95% of fires are human-caused – very little lightning in Hawaii
 - Hawaii doesn’t have historic fire regime
 - Most of the ecosystem developed prior to volcanic activity

- Limited fire-adapted species that have come from elsewhere
- Kunia Fire (2025)
 - Oahu – arsonist caught on Alertwest camera
- Hilo - many of the buildings are wooden and considered historic
 - Nothing built of bricks & mortar due to tectonic activity
 - Lost 5 buildings in the last 3 months
- National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy
 - Fire-Adapted Communities
 - Resilient Landscapes
 - Challenging – many plant species are non-native, but some have fire-adapted properties
 - In the early 1900 fire was used to open up sandalwood forests / ranching industry – denuded swaths of native plants
 - Fire has increased as ranching and agriculture has declined
 - Safe, Effective, Risk-based Wildfire Response
- Challenging to logistically connect the various islands
 - Also, each island has distinct culture
 - Helicopters are best transport – can’t send extra firefighters to help other islands as no equipment to support them
- Maui had several fires at the same time as Lahaina
 - Other islands had other fires as well following huge wind event (100+ mph wind)
 - 50” of rain on other islands
- Changes after Lahaina
 - HFD: Added 1 brush truck and 1 tactical tender at each fire station
 - ARFF: Adding brush trucks
 - DOFAW: Added 22 personnel, 15 brush trucks, tenders & heavy equipment
 - Maui FD: Adding 7 tactical tenders
- Lahaina
 - Had a fire in 2018 that burned 20 homes
 - Draft report had been compiled, but action items not followed
- Hawaiian Islands cover other jurisdictions with various resources without worrying about reimbursement
- AlertWest cameras now across most of the islands
 - Also have a mobile option as well
- Trying to leverage WatchDuty
- Interstate support for funding & discussions
- Added a new state fire marshal office
- Hawaii Firewise - HWMO (Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization)
 - Doubled Firewise communities after Lahaina
- Challenging dynamic with all of the different land ownerships

Experiential Leadership Working Group (George Risko & Ashley D’Antonio)

Action Items

ELWG	Plan and deliver Staff Ride workshop spring 2025
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Discussion:

- Met in Boise 18 months ago to pull together list of priorities & notes
 - Staff Ride updates
 - Build comprehensive list
 - Build “Contact Us” option for folks to suggest staff rides
 - Add all Staff Rides to map
 - Create Staff Ride library
 - Create list of Staff Ride cadre members

- Created form to query the field on what they need from Staff Rides
 - Received 36 responses in the first 6 months
 - There is a desire to build Staff Rides at local unit levels
 - Need to bring back Staff Ride workshop – can deliver in-house without OMNA
- Groups want to move forward with a Staff Ride workshop
 - May focus on Non-FS
- Forest Service – master OMNA contract
 - Two deliveries were not used
 - Used funds to support a local unit in getting their staff ride up and running (Twisp River)
 - Alpha/Beta delivery complete
 - Nationally recognized staff ride
 - The plan is to work with local units once a year to develop a staff ride
- Job of the committee is to bring expertise to local units to empower local units to create and deliver their own products
 - How do we build facilitators across country
 - Teach the art to storytelling
- Storytelling is where we can take experiences and translate into a relatable place
- Nuttall Fire Staff Ride
 - Geared for single resource level and below
 - Looking at turning into L-280 course that attendees of the Staff Ride would get certification in L-280
 - Where are the other opportunities to do something like this?
 - People want to go to Staff Rides, but this gives them the certification that is often required these days to approve travel / training

Leading in the Wildland Fire Service Publication (Richard Putnam)

Action Items

Richard, Ted, Justin, Gabe, Chris	Pull together small group to review and update 3 vignettes and finalize traits in next 6 months – final product by spring meeting
Gholston	Work with NWCG on options for printed product

Discussion:

- Restructured table to include accompanying traits with leadership principles
- Enhanced narrative to include clarification with traits in each section
 - Traits pulled from website, previous documents, other leadership documents
- How do we build upon this document in addition to the traits?
 - Vignettes
 - Each vignette ranges 500-1500 words
 - Consider updating just the ones that happened when product was published – others are historic and should remain
 - Hurricane Katrina
 - Grand Prix Fire
 - California Fire Storm
 - Can we have different versions of the publication with unique vignettes in each edition?
- Focus on getting a 2026 edition with the edits that we have and then work on additional edits
- Significant interest in providing vignettes that may resonate more with next generation of firefighters with more recent examples
- Value in keeping document succinct
- Consider versioning like IRPG
- What can we get done in the next 6 months?
 - Incorporate traits

- Get team together to review and update 3 vignettes
- This doesn't make it a static document – consider how we keep updating?
 - Can we do an annual appendix?
 - Do we update additional vignettes?
- Will the changes impact any trainings?
 - Let course delivery folks know, but shouldn't impact
- How do we ensure that this is getting out to folks
 - Need to work with NWCG to see how we can get printed versions
 - How can we leverage GPO print-on-demand services?
- Where can we leverage other locations / formats for it to live?
 - Website
 - Audiobook

Lead By Example Award: Future (Willie Knudsen)

Action Items

Mike	Explore option with NWCG for hosting form
Willie	Add Mike, TJ, Erica, Russ as editors for the submission form
Willie & Jaimie	Continue exploring options for having the form live somewhere else
Jaimie	Create flyer with QR code
Everyone	Share out flyer and continue promoting to respective networks
Willie	Send email to committee on qualities for selection panel members
Agency Reps	Send selection committee names to Willie
Willie	Look for additional team members

Discussion:

- All but one have been awarded for 2024 – the last one will be awarded first week of January
- Willie will be stewarding the award moving forward
- Added a section on website for “Tips for Successful Nominations”
 - SOPs speak to focusing on relying almost entirely on nomination forms when selecting recipients
- Digital form created
 - Will be adding to the website
 - Issue is that the form lives on Willie's OneDrive account
 - Add folks from committee as editors
- Operating guide approved last fall
- How do we continue to get the word out on the award?
 - Pretty well known, but hard to get people to engage with nomination process
- Carry over nominations from 2024 to 2025 nominations
 - Maintains an average of 15 nominations annually
- QR code for the form
 - Can we make stickers?
 - Make flyers
- Selection Committee
 - Each agency representative should submit at least one name
 - Would like to have 5-7 panel members
 - Can be anyone in wildland fire service, including dispatch, aviation, fire planners, fuels, agency administrators, etc.
 - There was some discussion about having form for folks to self-nominate, but challenging to select from random group of people
- Operating in a way that provides for successional planning
 - Would like to have someone who starts shadowing
 - Where should that person come from?

- Possibly from prior selection committee members
 - Look to add capacity with support – join pirates or bring in others to support
- Work with U.S. Hotshot Association in collaboration on award
 - They could cover cost
 - How do they navigate that it's not always a hotshot that gets the award
 - Maybe this solves next year, and then look to U.S. Wildland Fire Service
 - Maeve can also potentially cover
 - Connection to hotshot community does honor legacy of Paul Gleason
- Selection Committee – formed in January
 - Names submitted by first week of February for review
 - Up to agency rep to get awards presented
 - Presentations should be completed by April 15, so we can send out press release (present by September)
 - What is the intent of presentations?
 - Need to offer wider window so that people can be properly celebrated with a group of peers
- Average of 6-7 nominations a year
 - Nominations are due Dec. 31 each year
 - There was an era when we would receive 50+ nominations
 - It doesn't seem to be as well known in lower levels of fire management
 - This generation doesn't necessarily know about Paul Gleason in same way

L-480 Discussion (Russ Babiak)

Action Items

Everyone	Let Russ know if you're interested in reviewing UofA course
Everyone	Consider what is L-480? What are the pieces we have to have and what can we do without?

Vote:

- General consensus to continue to review external courses
 - Concerns that these external courses don't understand what we wildland fire do
 - Can we create an L-480 product that invites external participants, but still tailors to wildland fire service?
 - Can we take a design criteria to these institutions to ensure more focused approach?

Discussion:

- Handful of folks attended Boise State course to explore off-the-shelf course comparable to L-480 course
 - Came in lower a lower price than an L-480 would
 - Asked them to repackage into 1-day course that incorporates wildland fire components for upcoming Fire Managers Academy
 - BSU thinks they can repackage something that will meet L-480 course design criteria
- Russ met with University of Arizona
 - Developed a draft proposal
 - We already have national training center in Tucson
 - Cost is commensurate to current rates
 - Open to inviting students to join other existing offerings that will engage with people in other disciplines
- What is the demand for this course?
 - From some GATRs perspective, not super requested given it's not required
- Is there value to continue trying to find vendors for this course?
- When approaching organizations – provide *Leading in the Wildland Fire Service* and ask them to share their perspectives on how to present appropriate material
 - University lends credibility and ensures quality product and resources

- Continue the idea of asking people to connect with leadership touch points beyond those engrained in wildland fire service
- What can we benefit from learning with others in different sectors beyond wildland fire?
- L-480 is about emotional intelligence
 - Many attendees wish that they had taken earlier in their career
 - This could play key role as we transition to U.S. Wildland Fire Service and the need to maintain relationships
- Can we create opportunities in existing training hubs where people are used to traveling?
- Need to be intentional about how we're certifying additional opportunities
- Are there opportunities for remote options?
 - Some offerings like Cornell and Warton offer GSA pricing
 - Opens up a year-round training season
- How important is it that someone gets an L-480 certificate or is it more about the learning experience?
- How does this compare to FWDP?
- If we move toward outside offerings does this then become more "continuing education"?
 - There is some level of prestige that comes with L-course
 - Is there a way the committee can "endorse" a course?
- Collaboration with the work going on in the FWDP
- Would there be options for a national funding mechanism – will be difficult for a local unit to cover costs?
 - Short-term to get program off the ground
 - Would gauge supply / demand if people knew it was funded
 - Would cover all departments and agencies
- Could we draw from a format similar to the Forest Service's Apprenticeship Program?
- Continue to look at other academic institutions to consider
- What other courses are out there that focus on emotional intelligence?
 - Forest Service "Middle Leader"
- Need to create a model that doesn't hinge on single point of failure with a single vendor
- How are we including the piece that our leadership is tied to putting people's lives at risk
 - Doesn't match all industries - different levels of risk
- UofA has experience working with hospital sector
 - This may be something we find lacking in our review and ask for tweaks
- Different perspectives can be valuable – there's a reason the military sends staff to business school

L-481 (George Risko)

Action Items

Mike & Russ	Continue tracking S-420 development
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Discussion:

- Relatively static, but transition to CIMT has limited interest from new providers
- Currently only have MCS as provider
 - Lost some of their leads following internal restructuring
- When auditing courses – they often don't go over WFLDP without prompting
- New S-320 course
 - Built for those looking to operate at the Type 3 team level
 - Basic course for IMT
- S-420
 - New course, delivered alpha course last week at NAFRI
 - Beta delivered in April in Bakersfield, CA
 - Where does it belong in the qualification system as a requirement path?
- L-481 is an alternative to S-420
 - Trying to stay ahead of the game in terms of new S-420 delivery

- Visited S-420 alpha delivery
 - Looks a lot like a skills course rather than leadership components and focus on What do you do in your functional role?
 - New course brings more complexity and stress components for each functional area
 - Less explicit in interwoven leadership components than the prior course
 - Sim team 30+ people to facilitate
 - L-481 doesn't have components that teach skills portion
 - Hesitant to make assessment right now on whether L-481 still satisfies requirement – need to see Beta / final version
- GATRs still interested in delivery of both S-420 and L-481
- CIMTs have increased the complexities of what we're asking people to do, and they often move rapidly through process without being fully vetted
 - There are missing leadership / knowledge gaps with existing course offerings between Type 3 and CIMT
 - There's a generation of firefighters who have only been on campaign fires and are missing out on the tactical decision-making process of T5 / T4 initial attack
- Can we put together a package that provides content similar to S-336 course?
 - What opportunities are there for informal development workshops?
 - Ex. IHC superintendents coming together to share decision-making and lessons learned from an IA perspective.
- Current ongoing consolidation on alignment of federal qualifications across DOI and Forest Service
 - Agencies agreed to follow BLM (highest) requirements for L-courses

Leaders We Would Like to Meet (Mike Ellsworth)

Action Items

Everyone	Accomplish 2 interviews in 2026
Pirates	Meet to create SOPs
Boise Folks	Be prepared to capture folks who might be coming to Boise

Discussion:

- We have gathered a substantial list of names
- Conducted “Leaders We’d Like to Meet” interview with Alex Robertson
 - Crowd-sourced questions rather than sticking to prior standard questions
 - Filmed and recorded audio
 - Video options being considered
 - 5-minute segments on certain topics
 - 20-minute Ted Talk style
 - Divide whole thing into 25-minute segments
 - Could clean-up audio and have podcast interview
- Take away from Alex interview
 - Important for the interview to bring about stories – use questions to frame in a format that lends response to stories
 - Doing it within a team environment allowed us to think collaboratively
 - Having something on record is more important than having something perfect
- For other iterations
 - Good sound quality
 - Video quality
 - Consider more of round table style discussion instead of 1-on-1 interview
 - Reach out to professionals on how to edit
 - Consider what we want to do before an interview, so we know the kind of content and length of content
 - Planning ahead of time – questions, follow-up questions, location, format, etc.

- Limit barriers to continuing efforts
 - Look to accomplish 2 interviews in 2026
 - We have some existing resources to help with production
- Can be challenging for schedules to align for some folks – very busy
- Production quality standards have decreased with more DIY efforts on YouTube, etc.
 - Audio is still important
 - Could even consider doing something in Teams and record
- NWCG has contact for media assistance
 - Could consider putting together contract for week and have person available for recording
- Pirates would be first line of support to help start the process of planning, provide ideas, etc. for those looking to put together an interview

Website Support (Rick Gividen)

Action Items

Everyone	Start thinking about how the committee can leverage Portal for programs and courses
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Discussion:

- How can we increase engagement with content?
- A couple of years ago, group worked at NAFRI to develop Wildland Fire Learning Portal content
- How do we recreate WFLDP in the Portal so people can engage and we can track metrics?
 - Replicated content from website in Portal
 - Include video to engage people on each of the content pieces
 - Capitalize on the use AI to generate videos
- Enhanced learning tools that increase engagement
 - Provides metrics for what people are clicking on
- Would be great to capture course evals in Portal format to see how folks are engaging
- Reasons to use the website and reasons to use the Portal
- NWCG website – where people go to get information
- Portal – where people can interact with products

DAY FOUR – Thursday

Bin Items:

- Mike & TJ – Work on file structure and consider if Teams is the best location for our materials

Pulse Check 2025 (Alexis Waldron)

- Received 1,000+ responses for the *2025 Pulse Check* survey
 - Currently offered to Forest Service firefighters
 - Survey –
 - Mid-May to Mid-September
 - Mid-September to Mid-October
- 200-600 hours average overtime in 2025
- Management energy levels started a little lower this year, but overall energy levels didn't drop as much with less overtime than last season
- Ranked values on why people do this job & why they stay
 - Top value – Good Supervision (2024/2025)
 - Clear delineation from all other values
- Duck Model
 - Grouped together values that move together: good supervision, positive work environment, meaning & purpose
 - Other grouped values: good retirement, making money, affordable housing
- Ducks need both feet to stay buoyant and straight

- “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”
 - There will be times when you have to be stern and direct, but if they know you care, they understand where you’re coming from and they have a foundation of respect.
- Good supervision has to be deliberate and not over-promising
- Challenges in how we evaluate leadership
 - Right now, leadership is only evaluated by supervisors
 - We’ve never normalized a leader receiving candid feedback from their followers
- We’re more alike than we are different
 - People value connection
 - There will always be differences, but where can you find common ground?
- Can we reimagine L-480 to support middle managers?
 - How do we prepare our leaders to be ready to assume leadership at higher levels?
 - Maybe L-480 is a body of knowledge rather than a specific class
- How has this year provided additional stress through external factors not just the Fire Year?
 - Think about this as leaders
 - Neurons that wire together, fire together
 - Fear, anger, frustration, instability
 - Pay Structure Instability
 - New Administration / DOGE / Losing counterparts
 - Mental Health
 - Gaps in Communication & Leadership
 - This can cause disassociation and emotional reactivity
 - How do we counter and rebuild safe pathways
 - Rebuild repetition (safety)
 - Create stability
 - Build relationships and connect community
 - Nervous System Regulations
 - 10 minutes – grounding, breathwork, mindfulness
 - Reacts to repetition
 - Movement – Yoga, walking, running
- 1 in 3 firefighters experience trauma every year
 - How people cope with that is different for everyone
 - We need to be more deliberate about weaving health & wellness into leadership
 - Are there ways we can fold in with the Health & Wellness Committee?
- For structural resources – there’s an expectation that everyone has an awareness of CISM, how to get folks the resources and when to seek help for their personnel and themselves
 - Could this trigger point determination be part of L-481 / L-580?

Communications (Jaimie Olle)

Action Items

Everyone	Send Mike list of potential association /regional /national meetings that we could attend to share about committee – send where it is and a POC
Jaimie	Share out “Key Messages” and IAP handout with group
Jaimie	Create outreach toolkit in new folder structure
Jaimie & Nick	Brainstorm on how to move content over from blog to Substack
Jaimie	Look into the redirect on Fireleadership.gov
Everyone	Share photos and 1-3 sentences about leadership events
Jaimie	2026 Accomplishment Report – Week of Jan. 5
Everyone	Send out completed accomplishment report within sphere of influence
Jaimie	Create graphics package

Discussion:

- Is there a way to do a “what’s new” on the Portal? – Mike will follow up with Rick
- Historically committee has been hyper-focused on smokejumpers and hotshots
 - Can we bring reps in from other disciplines?
 - Have tried in the past and they’ve faded away
 - We need conduit to these groups rather than trying to bring in group of folks
- How do we find people who have credibility to send out communications about leadership committee?
- Accomplishment report has been helpful
- Has the committee tried packages?
 - Send copies of *Leading in Wildland Fire Service*, flyer, stickers?
 - Who are we sending to?
 - PRP used to send books and swag to targeted people who had reached out to Justin
- WFSTAR Refresher module, is it time for a leadership development module
- National / relevant meetings, such as
 - Hotshots – IC4 Training
 - Arizona Fire Academy
 - U.S. Hotshot Association
 - Dispatch
- Send Mike list of potential meetings that reps could attend and share about committee
- “What’s new with Leadership Committee”
 - Quick talking points that could be shared at meetings like duty officer calls, etc.
- We’ve developed IAP insert – who can we send it to?
- Website language – ensuring it’s valid and updated
 - International Association of Wildland Fire – Can we reach this group?
- Facebook
 - The more people that comment, like, share helps with the algorithm
- Blog
 - Can we move to Substack?
 - How can we move existing content to Substack?
- Lessons Learned Center
 - Funnel things to their Instagram
- Fireleadership.gov doesn’t seem to be redirecting
- How do we get leaders or prominent folks in fire community to endorse leadership committee – act as influencers?
 - Hotshot Wakeup
 - Hotshot Brewery
 - Anchor Point
 - Jocko – podcast
- Can we frame it as tools for change with the new USWFS?
- People can reshare Facebook posts to Instagram
 - Create toolkit for organic posting
- When we ask people where they get their information – the top answer is still agency emails
 - Challenges with Forest Service in “cascading communication” method – emails getting stuck at certain levels
 - The email needs to come from the person themselves
 - Sometimes it’s just getting to the right people – someone that other’s trust
- If there are well-crafted messages – there are some avenues to send out to all fire personnel in the Forest Service
- Regional / state training officers are often great group to send out

What is next & how do we do it? (Mike Ellsworth & Maeve Juarez)

Action Items

Discussion:

- If you signed up for something, please put some time into it
 - If you're running into capacity issues, let Mike know so we can leverage help
- Ideas for upcoming meeting locations / speakers
 - Military bases
 - Fort Benning
 - San Antonio Spurs – Gregg Popovich
 - World Cup organization
 - Reach out to other leadership groups to see if we can sit in on meetings
 - Attend large leadership conferences
 - National Leadership Conference – April
 - Hawaii
 - Taos Pueblo Revolt
 - Major corporation – Royal Caribbean Group
 - Mann Gulch Staff Ride
 - Lincoln National Forest – Agency Administration Staff Ride for 2024 Fires
 - State of Utah
 - Canada
 - Naval Academy
 - Disney
 - Airforce Academy / Waldo Canyon
 - Washington State – Hospital with first COVID patient
 - Bence Brown
 - Simon Sinek
 - West Point
 - National Fallen Firefighter event
- What do we need from this experience as a committee?
 - How do we become renowned for leadership beyond just the wildland fire service?
 - Meet with someone to learn –
 - How do you develop your organization?
 - How do you care about your employees?
 - How do you adapt to change?
 - How do you train your folks for high-stress / emerging situations?
 - Innovation
- Can we make the opportunity to include leaders of all levels in our organization?
- Could we pull together a symposium style event that brings in leaders to help us identify gaps?

2025 Meetings

- Mike will send a Doodle poll for meeting dates
 - Spring Meeting –
 - Fall Meeting –
 - Virtual Winter Meeting –
 - Virtual Early Fall Meeting –
- Work groups – make sure someone is represented
- Agency reps – send an alternate if unable to attend, especially for in person meetings.