

## NWCG LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

### Meeting Minutes

May 11-14, 2026 | Boise, Idaho

**Agency Representatives Present:** Mike Ellsworth, Chair (USWFS); George Risko – *Virtual* (NASF); Tess McCarville (USFS), Gabe Goodman (DOW Rep); Russell Hanyes (*not* NASF)

**Program Members:** TJ Gholson (USWFS); Russ Babiak (USWFS); LJ Brown (USWFS); Chris Ayer – *Virtual* (IACF); Ross Fielder – *Virtual* (USFS); Ted Adams (USFS); Justin Vernon (USFS); Joe Williams (USFS); Jaimie Olle – *Virtual* (USFS); Paul Cerda – *Virtual* (USWFS); Brian Sebastian (USFS); Jeremy Bennet (USWFS), Rick Gividen; Willie Knudsen (USWFS); Erica Lamb (NWCG); Sara Saarloos (NASF/ QMC)

**Special Guests:** Garrett Kirpach (Boise FD); Ben Faust (USWFS-Boise SMJ); Chris Wilcox (USWFS); Garth Fisher (USWFS); Emily Webb (USWFS)

#### Monday, May 11

Workshop for Leadership Workgroups: CMU, Continuing Education, Experiential Learning

#### Tuesday, May 12

##### **Introduction & Welcome** (Mike Ellsworth)

- Intent of the meeting is to identify 1-2 things that need to be now and one item to focus on in the future.
- Recognizing the large-scale transitions with the USWFS and USFS.
- Within the chaos there are opportunities to capitalize — federal agencies have now recognized L-courses as part of the incident qualification system.
- Workforce and Leadership Development positions are being created within the U.S. Wildland Fire Service that will be able to support the Leadership Subcommittee (LDSC) efforts.

##### **Guest Speaker: Chris Wilcox — USWFS Deputy Director, Fire Readiness and Training**

Updates on the USWFS organization transition

- As a past chair of the Leadership Committee, he is personally invested in the subcommittee's work
- Strong relationship between Chief Fennessy and Chief Fisher — significant work being done to align agencies' work and vision
- Technology is a major focus with the USWFS, including the creation of the Intelligences/Analytics Branch
- Interoperability is a major focus

Advice for LDSC moving forward

- Maintain the key connection to who we represent
- Continue to work on the help with the “day job” part of the job through the lens of our partnerships — who else can we reach out to for support and collaboration
- Experiential learning and tangible connections are key to drive behavior change — look into research about generational learning to connect with the next generation
- Recognize the single point of failures in the program and address them

##### **NWCG Updates** (Erica Lamb)

- Erica Lamb is moving to a new position within the USWFS, and a new coordinator will be identified soon
- For the USWFS, one representative has been identified for all NWCG committees
- July 1, the new NWCG organization will go into effect: 10 Management Committees and 36 Subcommittees
- LDSC will report to the Qualification Management Committee (QMC)
- Course updates relative to LDSC
  - S-320: certified December 2025, and required for Type 3 January 2027
  - S-420: Beta course in April 2026, expect available to the field December 2026
- LDSC will evaluate alternative path of certification for CIMT C&G of L-481 once S-420 officially completed

## **LDSC Roster and Reorganization** (Mike Ellsworth)

<b>Assigned To</b>	<b>Task Item</b>
Ellsworth	Extend invites to national groups to recruit people to attend winter meetings to provide operational perspective
Olle	Develop one-page “briefing paper” on WFLDP
Agency Reps	Continue to look for opportunities to present about committee

- Ellsworth will be chair and Maeve will be co-chair for LDSC
- LDSC is reviewing mission statement and objectives
- LDSC will be organizing into the following working groups:
  - Experiential Learning
  - Continuing Education Group
  - CMUL
  - Lead By Example Award
- Discussion on adding operational representation (SMJ, IHC, engine, helitack, dispatch)
  - We need to continue to find the “eyes forward” individuals to help ground truth what the committee is producing
- Consider attending the Western Fire Chief’s Meeting to talk WFLDP
- Continuing education model is being discussed in multiple arenas — there is a large desire to create what that model may look like

## **CMUL Updates** (TJ Gholston)

<b>Assigned To</b>	<b>Task Item</b>
L-381 (Brown)	Look for additional people to review Beta offerings
L-480 (Babiak)	Reach out to potential additional vendors to gauge interest in delivery
L-580 (McCarville)	Organize having all relevant entities for L-580 meet in-person

**L-180:** Static — IHC Training workgroup is analyzing if product is relevant and what potential changes need to be made

**L-280:** New version has been available and received good field feedback

**L-380:** Final approvals and implementation on websites should be completed by end of the month

- Lots of good interest from the GATR group — Sebastian suggested a potential “train the trainer” workshop to help GATRS with lead instructors

**L-381:** Recruiting Jamie Carpenter to assist with CMU; Held Alpha course review of EMSI in February and approved for a Beta delivery

**L-480:** Continue to explore academic options; Early stages of evaluating a new vendor Strategy Works; Expect an alpha delivery this fall; Continue to look for alternative vendors and structure of the course; USFS is reviewing the USFA Fire Academy Executive Officer School; US Airforce National Character and Leadership Symposium is another product worth exploring

**L-580:** 2026 Deliveries: Sandy (June), Gettysburg (November); Need to have coordination with LDSC, NAFRI, NIMO to align all efforts with Curriculum and Delivery of L-580; Is the target audience correct? Does it need to occur earlier in the career? Do we need national opportunities for middle leaders?

**Meetings:** CMU will continue to meet monthly to move the work forward

## **Communications** (Jaimie Olle)

<b>Assigned To</b>	<b>Task Item</b>
Olle	Resend out communications plan, IAP Flyer, socials link
Olle	Create briefing paper (see above)
Olle	Updated one-pager with QR codes to specific programs

**IAP Flyer:** Committee agreed it has been a great product, and we have received great feedback

**Messaging:** With the new USWFS structure, we need to find the correct connection point for communication flow

- Recognition that federal email system and Facebook have limited reach
- How do we leverage the fact that everyone must take L-180
- Focus on Leadership Levels.

**WFSTAR:** Use the launch of the new *Leading in the Wildland fire Service* to consider an RT product including podcast opportunities

**WFSTAR & Connection to the Committee** (Joe Schindel, Joe Ritz, Roland)

- Case studies are great learning tools and create immersive experiences for those who cannot attend a full staff ride
- Next product is using Twisp and Thirtymile Fires
- LDSC members need to help inform of opportunities to film and create production
- Current capability of A/V team: approximately 1-2 products per year
- Developing South Fork Staff Ride — could speak to variety of audiences

**Lead By Example Award** (Willie Knudsen)

Assigned To	Task Item
Olle	Create LBE Flyer
Knudsen	Develop preliminary selection method for reducing workload for panel

- 2025 selections have been made — two presented, two more waiting to be presented
- One recommendation for a lifetime achievement award
- 32 nominees considered — highest number of nominees in recent years
- No longer doing email/mail in nominations
- Letter of recognition for those nominated, but not selected after 2 year-cycle
- High volume of nominations is increasing workload for the panel
  - Developing a matrix to have applicants rated prior to panel evaluation
- Consider eliminating the specific categories — creating confusion to nomination and the panel
- Plaque creation is in a good place thanks to Risko and Juarez covering cost

**Tuesday, May 12**

**Guest Speaker, Dr. Joe Thomas, Navel Academy Stockdale Center**

- How do we continue to tell our origin story — anchor to the core components of history
- New generation coming in was not around for some of the critical events that led to paradigm shifts
  - Tier to more recent examples first to make connection points
  - Need community connected to event to be ready to talk about and share
- Focus on compelling, engaging storytelling that evokes emotional response
  - Encourage middle and new leaders to find their voice and share stories / lessons

**Continuing Education Working Group** (Ted Adams)

Assigned To	Task Item
Ellsworth	Reach out to NWCG for “Professional Reading Program” analytics
Vernon	Write blog post talking about “Professional Reading Program”

**Campaign:** Q4 will be ready for review soon

**Leadership Snacks:** How can we create internally using WFSTAR?

**“Leaders We’d Like to Meet”:** In the works — Alex Robertson, Kurt LaRue, Anthony Escobar

### “Professional Reading Program”

- Web form — generates about half of new books for each year
- 2026 list has rolled out — good input and support from others
- 2027: Diamond Mountain working on “The Big Burn” study guide
- Looking to bring back a “Chief’s Choice” book with questions for DOI/FS/IChiefs as part of 2027 list
- Look to leverage technology to improve products

### General:

- Seeing increasing enrollment in the Portal — group currently is not creating new content
- Need to be more thoughtful on how infrastructure is built so people can easily find products
  - We need someone to lead effort to update Portal with more cohesive vision
- How do we find people who have time/space to innovate and explore ideas?
  - Consider developing list of priority projects for committee — possible opportunities to bring in detailers through DOI to focus on leadership
- Consider one-pager that communicates leadership is a critical component in being mission-ready and resilient and tie to Alexis’s research — ground in data
- Move “**Leadership & Media**” under Pirate group

### Leading in the Wildland Fire Service (Mike Ellsworth)

Assigned To	Task Item
Group	Review draft vignettes and additions by end of meeting
Vernon/Ellsworth	Develop options for logo

- Reviewed the current working draft that includes addition of traits and updated vignettes
- Field will be able to order through the Great Basin Cache
- Group to review one more time and come to final draft by end of meeting
- Future of the product: Potential audiobook option; Review every 3 years with new dated issue every 5 years
- New version communication/rollout plan: Blog post from chair, short video, email, social media, website, etc.

### Experiential Leadership Working Group: (George Risko)

Assigned To	Task Item
McCarville	Coordinate developing StoryMap product to capture all staff rides
Group	Evaluate sand tables / tactical decision-making products

- Working on getting back to workshops — working on better telling our story
- Interactive map: Need to review *Staff Ride* spreadsheet
  - Considering building a StoryMap that would fill the gap with lesser-known staff rides
- Helpful to expand who can deliver workshops
- Do not have confirmed dates for east/west locations for spring 2027 Staff Ride Workshop delivery
  - Have flyer and Portal page built
  - Budget ~ \$5,000
  - People will register in the Portal — cap at 20 participants
  - Difficult to coordinate with existing staff rides
  - Will be delivered by wildland fire staff
- Sand Tables / Tactical Decision-Making Exercises: nothing to report
- Exploring opportunities to deliver L-380 using a staff ride for teaching component — concern that some might equate general staff ride as having taken L-380
- Develop list of people who are skilled at conference group leads (CGL) delivery

## Leveraging FWDP and the Learning Portal (Rick Gividen)

Assigned To	Task Item
Ellsworth, Vernon, Babiak	Develop landing page / infrastructure / labeling content

- For Portal changes (begin with the end in mind) — what do we want to measure?
  - Easily consumable
  - Need to get the right group together to understand what we want to accomplish and map out
- The Portal has a rolling feed that could “recommend” content to people
- Look into building a self-evaluation assessment to help people understand which resources would be most relevant
- Change paradigm to a gallery of lessons pulled from existing coursework
  - It can be challenging to introduce a concept out of context
  - How do we leverage material to reach younger firefighters who may not know what they are searching for and to look for it in the first place?
- Home page content: Is this what we want to grab their attention first? Is there something that is a better lead?
- Our curriculum is about building on a base and then recontextualizing based on where you are in your leadership journey.
- What could a new model of L-480 look like?
  - Can we create a program in the Portal that would be available to everyone?
  - It would not replace L-480, but would provide online learning opportunity
  - Consider it a part of continuing education opportunities

**Thursday, May 13, 2026**

## Who Are We & What is Our Future (Mike Ellsworth)

Assigned To	Task Item
Ellsworth, Babiak	Develop list of people who can be resources to vet content
Everyone	Invite new people to December meeting
Everyone	Pull together list of groups that we should be reaching out to

- With restructuring into GA model, how do we enter conversation with leadership at the appropriate points?
- Cognizant of opportunities & watch outs during restructuring on how we communicate
- Leadership matters, senior leaders are saying it, field surveys are showing it
- This committee was not founded to be bureaucratic
- Focus on how we can reduce barriers, including barriers to sharing messages

## Meeting Schedule and Future Meetings (Mike Ellsworth)

Assigned To	Task Item
Ellsworth	Send bi-monthly email to committee about current activities

- Dates for upcoming meetings
  - **Dec 7-11, 2026** — winter meeting
  - **Mar 1-5, 2027** — spring meeting
- Is twice a year the best schedule?
  - Some people liked the two in-person and then quarterly Teams meetings
  - Concern about having meetings for sake of meeting cycle without defined purpose
  - Looking at 1 to 2-hour meeting in-between in-person meetings
  - Consider increasing the follow up expectations — use a product that defines tasks and milestones
  - Some working groups meeting once/month
  - It would be nice to have monthly email from Mike to get an overview of what is going on
  - Agreed to continue with biannual in-person meetings with working groups