

Northern Rockies Coordinating Group Aviation Committee Meeting

June 27, 2007

MTDNRC Air Operations, Helena, MT.

Members Present: Allen Edmonds (Chair), Chuck Brenton (Co-Chair), Kent Hamilton, Shawn Bayless, Bob Burke, Eddie Morris

The meeting commenced at 10:00 a.m., by Chuck welcoming all members.

The first order of business was a review of the charter. It was decided that a change from a semi-annual meeting to an annual meeting would be beneficial. Meetings could be called more frequently if required or deemed necessary.

Discussion of additional membership to the committee ensued. The resulting recommendation is: 1) Dispatch representation should occur. 2) A liaison to the NRCG should attend. 3) Ad hoc technical support from AMD should be available. These recommendations were discussed concerning levels of involvement and function. Different names for each role were mentioned and follow up regarding who would attend will occur. These charter changes will need to be approved by Tom Corbin of the BOD.

Chair and Co-Chair assignments were discussed. Allen offered to finish the year as the Chair, plus serve in the same capacity next year. Chuck offered to do the same as Co-Chair. This met with unanimous approval. It was felt that a balance between federal and state involvement in these positions should always occur.

Next order of business were the “tasks to be accomplished” as assigned by NRCG.

First among these was the need to develop an operating plan allowing for the NRCG to utilize interagency aircraft. There has been a practice in place since 2003, but it hasn't been formalized into a plan. Discussion revolved around how to take into account the different policies controlling each agency's aircraft. Common ground would need to be found and plan developed from there. In viewing how cumbersome that might be, it was suggested to look at the MOB guide to determine what procedures are contained within chapters 20 and 80. A review of the MOB guide, with assistance from NRCG BOD, to determine how interagency utilization could be facilitated would be a better course than developing another plan. Once aircraft and pilot approval has been secured, the MOB guide could dictate utilization, scheduling or availability.

At this point, Chuck raised an issue concerning the approval process on state aircraft as a cooperator. Attendees at this year's meeting of the Western Area State Aviation Committee (WASAC) were able to come to consensus on the establishment of a “state cooperators minimum standards list” versus cooperators being lumped in with contractors in the aircraft approval process. This would allow an approved set of national standards for interagency cooperators be developed and utilized. Cooperators, through this list, could fully comply, allowing for any interagency use; partially comply to allow for non-passenger operations, including restricted category or external load; or choose not to

comply and not act as an interagency asset. Chuck was seeking input from the committee to help in the development of the list and support as it moved through the approval process.

The next topic of discussion centered on the need for qualified aviation personnel throughout the area. Also, how to attract and maintain quality individuals in the air operation and management positions. The initial observation was that many people have been trained, but most of these people have difficulty in accepting an assignment because it conflicts with their primary job or duties. It was mentioned that almost 300 trained Helicopter Managers are in the region, with only 20 to 30 available at any given time. Eddie mentioned that a person was recently hired by the Forest Service to identify the needs and how to better meet these needs of fire personnel in critical aviation positions. The recommendation of the aviation committee is to task the training committee to determine by inventory how many people in the area have received training, but have not completed their task books. Additionally, another inventory needs to be taken on who is fully qualified to function in an assigned aviation position. Lastly, these inventories should be merged into a list of mentors and trainees who should go be allowed to go on assignment together to ensure the trainee receives quality training in the completion of the task book. This will ultimately cause an increase in the number of fully qualified aviation personnel.

Interagency cooperation in aviation training was the next topic. All members described an excellent working relationship exists within the area and no one had any concerns regarding the availability of training or sharing training resources.

Allen asked the members to forecast their FY08 aviation resources. He understood that budgets might not yet be developed, but to give their best estimates and he would brief the BOD on the forecast.

The next meeting will be a conference call on October 10, 2007 at 10:00a.m.

Eddie also asked the members about participation in the NRCG daily conference call during the height of the fire season. He was asked if the time could be moved forward to 08:30. He will be sending out a briefing format to each participant to reduce the length of the call. The format should allow for a concise, logical update to the group by each caller.

Kent mentioned he has a weekly conference call occurring on Tuesdays at 09:30a.m. primarily for SEAT operations, but anyone is welcome. The number is 866-859-0799, access code 6867688#.

The meeting concluded at 12:30p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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