

Wildland Fire Decision Support System Implementation Clarification White Paper (Decision Documentation and GACG Responsibilities)

As WFDSS has developed and expanded over the past two years, a number of activities are being performed inconsistently or with little guidance at various levels of interagency fire management organization. The purpose of this paper is to present consistent guidance in the use of WFDSS at all levels. Areas specifically addressed in this paper include:

- National guidance for decision publication
- Clarification of Geographic Area Coordinating Group responsibilities

DECISION PUBLICATION:

The significance of the published decision for an incident that has progressed beyond initial action is not totally clear in terms of purpose, timing, and importance. Decisions and their implementation of management actions must be documented with clear rationale of why these actions are the best management practices. The following information provides clarification regarding the importance of decisions and establishes guidelines for when decisions are completed.

Why published decisions are needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The published decision documents that incident management strategies follow policy and approved management plans. • Published decisions ensure that agency administrator approval was obtained and that the fire management organization is acting within the scope of the management actions defined. • On multi-jurisdictional fires, published decisions can document that all affected fire agencies participated in the decision process and concur with the strategies selected. • Published decision, approved by the line officer/agency administrator, provides the framework of the actions to be performed under the Delegation of Authority. The Delegation of Authority for an incident commander authorizes the person/persons to operate on a specific unit with an umbrella framework of actions to conduct work. • Published decisions in WFDSS document the prescribed course of action and the rationale for actions that incur costs. • Portions of the published decision can be used to request FLAME Act funding.
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When a Published Decision is needed - at various times during the course of the fire	<p>Initial Decision - An initial decision should be published within 24 hours after the determination that a published decision is needed, or within 24 hours of requesting an incident management team. Considerations for determining that a decision is needed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The fire has not been contained by initial attack resources dispatched to the fire. ○ The fire will not have been contained within the initial attack management objectives established for that zone or area according to the unit's planning documents. ○ The incident objectives include both protection and resource benefit elements consistent with land management planning documents. ○ The fire affects or is likely to affect more than one agency or more than one administrative unit within a single agency (for example more than one National Forest). ○ The fire is burning into or expected to burn into wildland-urban interface. ○ Significant safety or other concerns such as air quality are present or
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	<p>anticipated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The relative risk assessment indicates the need for additional evaluation and development of best management practices for achieving land and resource objectives. ○ The criteria for Flame Act funding are anticipated and documentation will be needed. <p>Initial published decisions may not need a great deal of detail or supporting analyses, assuming that the fire has not exhibited extraordinary burning conditions or emerged quickly as a high complexity incident. Even in those rare cases where a fire almost immediately becomes high complexity, providing clear initial direction quickly to those responsible for managing the fire while more detailed analyses are prepared can be critical.</p>
<p>When a Published Decision is needed - at various times during the course of the fire, continued</p>	<p>New Decision - Specific variables influence incident complexity and the social and political considerations that come into play, especially on multijurisdictional fires with multiple decision-makers. As incident complexity rises it may become necessary for additional supporting analyses to inform decision making. The more supporting analyses needed, the more time required to complete those analyses. Depending on the complexity of the incident, a new decision should be published within 2-3 days for less complex incidents and within 4-7 days for more complex incidents. The same criteria above plus the following considerations can guide determinations about publishing a new decision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The periodic assessment indicates the course of action (decision) is no longer valid. ○ The management needs of the incident exceed existing capability. ○ The expected costs of incident management exceed agency-established thresholds. ○ The fire moves or is expected to move beyond the planning area analyzed. ○ Management Action Points have been established since the initial decision was published and additional information is needed to further manage the incident over time. ○ The line officer is considering ordering an IMT.

While agency administrators need to have published decisions to provide an adequate and formal framework for incident management, managers do not need to publish a WFDSS decision to take advantage of the many analytical and documentation tools within the system.

GEOGRAPHIC AREA COORDINATING GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES:

Under the WFDSS organization, roles at the national and unit levels have been developed or defined in the system. At the unit level (individual National Forest, BLM District, National Park Unit, National Wildlife Refuge and individual tribe or reservation) the roles in WFDSS are quite clear. Recent experience shows a need for a geographic area level set of roles and responsibilities to assist in the coordination between individual units, and between the unit and national levels. Some Geographic Area Coordinating Groups, but not all, have begun development of WFDSS roles and responsibilities at that level. In addition, some geographic areas have begun to develop guidance for decision support documentation relating to content, time frames, and interagency decision documentation.

Additionally some WFDSS Geographic Area Editors have taken on “Agency Expert” duties given the need to support the field in writing good decision documents and assisting in implementing policy. There is reluctance on the part of some Geographic Area Editors to assume responsibility for some of these tasks without authority being delegated from the national or geographic area coordinating group level.

Geographic Area Coordinating Group responsibilities include:

<p>Geographic Area Coordinating Groups - guidance for interagency/inter-unit operations within the framework of WFDSS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection and management of Geographic Area Editors, including consideration of state agency Geographic Area Editors where feasible. • State-Federal interactions in WFDSS including permissions, approval authority, and process. • Protocols for interaction with Agency Administrators and Incident Commanders within the Geographic Area in relationship to decision support/WFDSS. Are there team responsibilities either within or in support of WFDSS? • National, regional, and agency specific minimum decision content and decision publication requirements. • Identification of agency point of contact. • Need for and establishment of WFDSS Duty Officers to provide technical support. • Designation or credentialing of fire behavior specialists in the Production side of WFDSS (akin to what red card committees do). • Role of the geographic area coordination center in supporting WFDSS and assigning technical expertise to units that lack such expertise. Provide a framework for the process to prioritize WFDSS analyses under different preparedness levels. • Define or assign the responsibility for WFDSS training within the geographic area. • Provide access to WFDSS technical assistance information such as web sites for agency guidelines, agency contacts, etc. • Define the process for determining when decision support centers might be established within the GACC, who will likely coordinate the information, the tie to intelligence and the Predictive Services group, and their coordination with Geographic Area Editors.
<p>Geographic Area Coordinating Groups – clarification of individual roles with Geographic Areas (GA Editors, and Agency Experts).</p>	<p>GA Editor – works as an interagency technical expert, able to assist any caller from any agency. It is expected that this workload will be reduced yet not removed when the WFDSS Help Desk is on line within the next 6 months. Typical tasks would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant roles in the Training and Production systems, • Disseminate technical information such as upgrades to the WFDSS system and “how to” guidance, • Transfer/Modify ownership of incidents or grant incident privileges when the incident owner is not available, • Answer technical “how to” questions and assist in navigating the system, and • Provide “WFDSS duty officer” technical help during off hours and weekends. This technical help goes beyond the functions of the Help Desk. <p>Agency Expert – assists or otherwise provides oversight in the development of decision content for WFDSS decisions, some content may be agency-specific. Typical tasks would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief agency leadership in fire, resources, and line as needed on WFDSS decision content. • Facilitate interagency cooperation on multijurisdictional wildfires within the scope of duties outlined by geographic area.