



Interagency Interoperability Oversight Group



Date: June 11, 2012

Subject: Central Oregon Interagency Integrated Radio Pilot Project Closeout

To: Regional Forester Northwest Region, Forest Supervisor Ochoco National Forest, Forest Supervisor Deschuttles National Forest, State Director Oregon and Washington Bureau of Land Management, District Manager Prineville District BLM, Center Manager Northwest Area Coordination Center, Director of Fire and Aviation Management Northwest Region

Background

In July 2009 IIOG members visited the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center and the Central Oregon; specifically the Ochoco and Deschuttles National Forests and the Prineville District Bureau of Land Management. The Central Oregon Fire Management Service (COFMS) area is an example of interagency cooperation as a center of Service First and interagency fire management. With interagency cooperation so fully implemented in many areas in COFMS, the IIOG felt that the opportunity existed to further explore the possibilities of analyzing the Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) radio systems for optimization and improvement where possible. This project was a "pilot" opportunity with the intended outcome of an independent review of current operating procedures and suggestions for incremental improvements that could possibly be applied throughout the nation in interagency settings. Never was there an intention that the IIOG would fund a new radio system in the area; but that any identified improvement possibilities could be implemented with existing agency/bureau funding structures and governance.

From November through December 2010 the contractor visited the area to perform site surveys of all existing radio sites within the COFMS area and learned of partner radio systems (county, BIA, etc.). FS and BLM technicians accompanied the contractors and facilitated interagency conversations. The contractor conducted multiple listening sessions amongst various interdisciplinary users of the radio system and partners; including recreation, fire, field-going personnel from all parts of the organization, aviation, and law enforcement.

Summary and Result of Project

The contractor recommendations and analysis have helped confirm that our technicians and field managers are effectively managing the radio systems in place and validated that the experts in conventional VHS radio system are FS and Department of the Interior personnel. During this independent review the contractor was asked to look outside our organizations to find out if there was a better way of doing this. Nothing significant was discovered. This has validated that we are providing conventional VHF radio as it should be.

The team recognizes that there are technical issues that the funding could have resolved. However, this project provided the process to honestly look at our current operations. We have learned that we do know how to provide VHF radio to our organizations, but need to enhance the way we work together on a national basis. The anticipated redundancy in tower facilities proved to be non-existent. Further interagency cooperation is possible through enhanced cooperative agreements between the participating agencies. The investment made should provide for a model for COFMS and the rest of the country and encourage closer collaboration amongst interagency partners.

Follow-On Actions and Discussion/Thoughts

The project team envisions taking the existing interagency cooperation a little further to enhance the radio system where possible. For example, the radio systems meet in the dispatch center and that is where all various agencies meet and connect via console. Perhaps we can take it a step further to technically improving agency systems as redundant control or other possibilities.

In addition the team recommends:

- A more formalized set of standard interagency agreements that can be used as a template for COFMS and the rest of the country.
- Work toward modification of policy regarding radio frequency sharing amongst land management agencies.
- Use of the existing BLM / FS Radio Strategic Plan as an example for implementation between departments.

The team is collaborating to provide a summary of the final report from contractor which will include lessons learned and suggestions for implementation in COFMS and elsewhere. This report is scheduled to be available for your review by July 15, 2012.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact the IIOG Program Manager, Kolleen Beesley at 208-906-0326 or kkbeesley@fs.fed.us.



JIM DOUGLAS
Chair, Interagency Interoperability Oversight Group



cc: IIOG Principal Members and Alternates and Advisors, Project Team Members