COGPLEXITI · SYSTEMS & DECISION ANALYSIS

THE INCIDENT TIER

Incident Response and Coordination Between the System and the Operational Leader

JAYSON COIL

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The Incident Tier is the incident tier of a three-tier body of work. Above it, *The System Tier* addresses the institutions, incentives, and futures of the American wildfire system, and the *Operational Leader's Field Guide* (ISBN 979-8-9959056-1-5) addresses the operational-leader level.

DISCLAIMER

The views, frameworks, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Sedona Fire District, Southwest Incident Management Team 1, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Wildland Fire Service, or any other agency or organization. This document is not doctrine. It is a professional analysis informed by operational experience, research, and study.

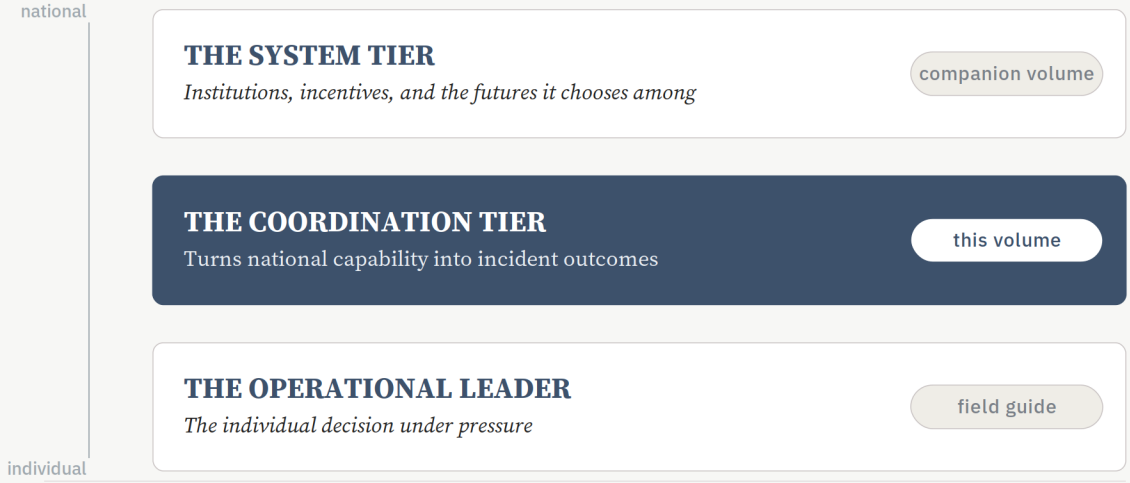
The analysis in this volume is intended for professional and policy audiences. It does not replace agency policy, doctrine, or authoritative legal and regulatory sources. Readers are responsible for exercising professional judgment appropriate to their specific context.

How to Read This Volume

FIGURE 1 · THE BODY OF WORK

Where the incident tier sits

Three tiers, from the national architecture to the individual decision.
This volume is the one in the middle — where the other two meet.



"The coordination tier is where the system's tensions become this week's decisions."

This is the incident tier of a body of work that runs from the national architecture to the individual decision. *The American Wildfire System Under Reorganization* and its companion futures analysis operate at the system level — institutions, incentives, and the worlds the system is choosing among. *The Operational Leader's Field Guide* and its Companion operate at the operational-leader level — the leader's own decision discipline under pressure. Between them sits this tier: incident response and coordination — the machinery that converts national capability into incident outcomes, the people who live through an incident and what they needed from the system, and the administrator who must build the instruments before the season tests the answer.

The volume is one argument in three movements, read in order or used apart:

Movement I — The Allocation Decision appreciates the coordination tier without judgment, defines its problem against twenty-seven documented conditions, and develops a season package sized to the fire year's clock.

Movement II — What the Stakeholders Needed draws on the record of a recent significant wildland fire incident to set out what each stakeholder class needed, and converts that record into seventeen signed-and-staged instruments.

> Movement III — The Fire Chief as Agency Administrator turns the instruments into an action catalog for the officer newly holding administrator authority, organized by functional domain from initial attack through aerial firing.

The movements share a vocabulary. Instruments carry IR-numbers (the readiness package of Movement II) and SP-numbers (the season package of Movement I); where a later movement cites one, the definition sits in an earlier one, which is why the movements are ordered as they are. The design discipline is common throughout: instruments a named owner can sign rather than exhortations, local rationality applied symmetrically to every actor, and the standing finding that what is not built before the event is improvised after it, at a price someone else pays.

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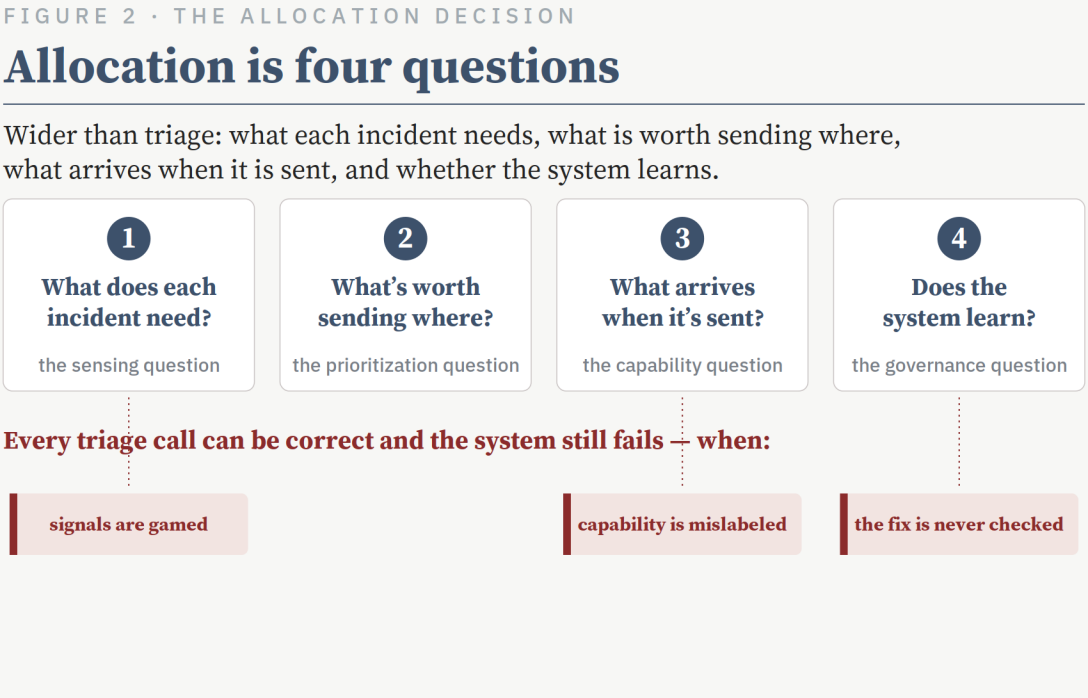
Movement I — The Allocation Decision

Incident and Resource Prioritization in a System Under Load

Reading the Allocation Decision

FIGURE 2 · THE ALLOCATION DECISION



"A system can fail at allocation while every triage decision is technically correct."

This is the incident tier of a body of work. *The American Wildfire System Under Reorganization* and its companion futures analysis operate at the system level — institutions, incentives, and the worlds they are choosing among. The *Operational Leader's Field Guide* operates at the operational-leader level — the leader's own decision discipline under pressure. Between them sits the tier this volume addresses: the machinery that converts national capability into incident outcomes — the reporting that tells the system what is happening, the prioritization that decides what is worth sending where, the teams and qualifications that determine what actually arrives when it is sent, and the governance that is supposed to learn whether any of it worked. The coordination tier is where the system-level tensions become this week's decisions and where operational-leader skill meets the conditions that decide whether skill is enough.

The definition of the allocation problem used here is deliberately wider than triage. Allocation is three inseparable questions, plus a fourth that governs them: *What does each*

incident actually need? — the sensing and strategy question, answered through reports, requests, and the judgment behind them. *What is worth sending where?* — the prioritization question, answered at geographic and national coordination levels when demand exceeds supply. *What arrives when it is sent?* — the capability question, answered by how teams are built, qualified, developed, and sustained. And *does the system learn?* — the governance question, answered by whether changes to any of the above are evaluated against anything. A system can fail at allocation while every triage decision is technically correct, because the signals were gamed, the capability was mislabeled, or the change that was supposed to fix it was never checked. This volume treats all four questions as one problem, because at the coordination tier they are.

Three commitments govern the work, carried over from the companion volumes. *Explain, don't judge:* every condition documented here is presented with its mechanism and with the local rationality of the actors inside it — including the national coordinators, the architects of recent reforms, and the institutions this volume's likely readers are inclined to blame. The question throughout is never who failed; it is what conditions made these outcomes likely. *Multi-level honesty:* the observations originate substantially from the incident management and geographic-area perspective, and the volume deliberately adds the chairs that perspective cannot see from — the home unit's ledger, the national allocator's genuine problem, the state and tribal supply side, and the county at the receiving end of an unfilled order. *Evidence discipline:* conditions are marked by their sourcing — public record, the author's operational record, or both — and a verification list at the end identifies what should be independently confirmed before any external use. The volume runs the full discipline. Parts I through III are the appreciation: the machinery, the conditions, and the gap. Part IV defines the problem, tested against the register for coverage, multi-level honesty, and solution hygiene. Part V develops the approach — design principles, the decision-rights map across the consensus bodies that actually govern this tier, a season package executable within one fire year, and the structural options honestly costed. Parts VI and VII are the red team and the dissent, argued at full strength against this volume's own reasoning; Part VIII is the recommendation, with its falsification criteria stated in advance. A reader who skips the red team and the dissent has not read the recommendation — they are part of it.

A note on urgency, stated here because it shapes everything after. The futures analysis showed the system's decisive forks front-loaded into 2026–2031 and its default future built from deferral. The coordination tier is where that argument becomes immediate: this tier is operating *this season*; its degradation is measured in structures and acres this year, not in 2046; and it is the tier where partners, legislators, and the public observe the system weekly — which means it is where the system's credibility is earned or spent in real time. A system that loses credibility at the coordination tier invites exactly what the futures analysis warned of: a solution imposed from outside, in a catastrophe's window, designed by whoever is standing closest to the microphone. Coordination-tier repair is not

a sequel to the system-level work. It is the concurrent track — and several of the futures' own signposts are generated here.

Part I — The Machinery and Its History

What the coordination tier is, where it came from, and the as-built record through June 2026

1.1 The Coordination Tier, Defined

Between the national architecture and the fireline sits a tier of machinery that most descriptions of the wildfire system skip, because it is plumbing: the incident status summary that feeds the national picture each morning; the geographic area coordination centers that broker resources among their units; the national coordination apparatus that sets priorities when the system is oversubscribed; the multi-agency coordinating groups that make the priority calls; the team typing, rotation, and qualification systems that define what a "team" is and what it can be trusted with; and the delegation instruments by which an agency administrator hands an incident to an incident management team and remains accountable for what the team does with it. This tier has no single owner — it is governed by consensus bodies, operated by interagency centers, staffed by a militia, and used by sovereigns — and it has one function: to convert capability that exists somewhere into outcomes that are needed somewhere else, under time pressure, against competing demands, with incomplete information. When the tier works, nobody notices, which is the operational definition of infrastructure. When it degrades, the degradation is invisible at every individual decision and unmistakable in the season's totals — which is why this volume exists.

1.2 The Doctrine Fire Built

The coordination tier's grammar is the wildfire community's most exported achievement. The 1970 Southern California fire siege — hundreds of fires, sixteen deaths, jurisdictions colliding on shared ground — produced the congressionally funded FIRESCOPE program, and FIRESCOPE produced the Incident Command System: common terminology, modular organization, span of control, unified command — interoperability achieved by standardizing the *interfaces* between organizations rather than the organizations themselves. Through the 1980s the fire community generalized ICS into the National Interagency Incident Management System; after September 11, 2001, the nation generalized the fire community's work into NIMS, and the National Response Framework made it the doctrinal spine of all-hazards response, with wildland fire seated as Emergency Support Function 4. Two features of this lineage matter for everything that follows. First, the system was built *bottom-up*: its legitimacy rests on a half-century of consensus standards — the NWCG qualification system chief among them — that let a

crew from Georgia work for a division supervisor from Oregon without translation. Second, the doctrine's coordination layer was designed for *support, not command*: the Multi-Agency Coordination System that NIMS codifies exists to prioritize and allocate scarce resources among incidents, explicitly not to direct tactics on any of them — a boundary whose erosion is one of this volume's documented conditions.

1.3 The Mobilization Machine

The allocation machinery operates as a tiered brokerage. An incident orders what it needs; the local dispatch fills what it can; unfilled orders escalate to one of the geographic area coordination centers — the GACCs, each serving a geographic area with its own coordinating group of federal, state, and partner agencies — and orders the geographic area cannot fill escalate to the National Interagency Coordination Center at Boise, which brokers across the nation under the doctrine of *total mobility*: any resource, anywhere, for any incident, regardless of whose patch it wears. Above the brokerage sits the priority machinery: at national preparedness levels 4 and 5 — the scale runs 1 through 5, set by fire activity and resource commitment — the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) establishes incident priorities and directs the allocation of critically scarce resources, with geographic-area MAC groups doing the same within their areas. The system's pressure reading is the *unable-to-fill* — the order that comes back empty — and its safety margins are drawdown levels: the minimum capability each area holds home regardless of demand elsewhere. Feeding the whole apparatus is a lattice the companion volumes documented at the system level and this volume meets in operation: state master agreements, interstate compacts, EMAC, tribal agreements, and local mutual aid — the instruments by which the majority of the nation's fire capability, which is not federal, flows into and out of the national pool. The machine's daily product is mundane and extraordinary: on a hard August day it repositions thousands of people and hundreds of aircraft among incidents it will never see, on the strength of forms, phone calls, and trust.

1.4 The Sensory and Decision Organs

Three instruments carry the information the machine allocates by. The *ICS-209 Incident Status Summary* is the system's sensory organ: the daily report from each significant incident — size, activity, resources committed, structures threatened, values at risk, projected needs — aggregated into the national situation picture that MAC groups prioritize from. It is a form with a long lineage and a single national template, and — a fact central to Part II — a template is the only thing its users share. The *decision documentation* lineage runs from the Escaped Fire Situation Analysis through the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis to today's Wildland Fire Decision Support System: the instrument by which the agency administrator's strategy for the incident — objectives,

courses of action, risk, cost — becomes a decision of record. The *complexity assessment* (the Risk and Complexity Analysis, PMS 236) is the instrument by which incidents are matched to organizations: it rates the incident's demands and indicates what level of incident management organization is warranted. Around these instruments operates the workforce model the companion volumes documented as the militia: incident management teams are not standing organizations but rosters — employees whose day jobs are elsewhere, assembled by rotation, available because their home units release them — plus administratively determined hires and retirees who fill the gaps. Every condition in Part II runs through at least one of these organs, which is why the volume treats reporting, deciding, typing, and staffing as one nervous system rather than four programs.

1.5 The Complex Incident Management Consolidation, As Built

The largest coordination-tier structural change of the modern era arrived in this decade. For a generation, large-fire management ran on a two-tier team system: Type 1 incident management teams for the most complex incidents, Type 2 teams for major fires below that threshold, with separate qualification tracks for command and general staff at each level. Beginning with direction developed through the Incident Workforce Development Group and approved across the Fire Management Board, the NWCG Executive Board, and NMAC, the system piloted Complex Incident Management Teams in the Rocky Mountain geographic area in 2022 and transitioned nationally on a schedule targeting full implementation in early 2024: Type 1 and Type 2 teams were reclassified into a single CIMT configuration for all incidents above Type 3 complexity, with a standard roster concept built around a core of critical positions supplemented by a pool, and with previously qualified Type 2 command and general staff offered transition pathways to Complex qualification through advanced coursework or a field evaluation option; the legacy Type 1 and Type 2 position qualifications were subsequently archived. The stated rationale deserves its full strength, because Part II's conditions land harder against an honest baseline: the Type 1/Type 2 distinction had blurred in practice, with Type 2 teams routinely assigned to incidents that outran their label; the two-tier structure fragmented a thinning bench across duplicate rosters; team availability was declining as the militia thinned; and a single configuration promised simpler mobilization, aligned standards, and more efficient management of the people the system actually had. Every element of that rationale describes a real problem. What the consolidation did about those problems — and what it assumed in doing it — is the subject of Part II's largest cluster.

1.6 The Reforms in Motion

The coordination tier is also mid-reform in its training and qualification machinery. NWCG's Incident Performance and Training Modernization effort is transitioning the qualification system toward a performance-based model — updated position descriptions, incident position standards, next-generation position task books, and revised training — and parallel work continues on team configuration and rotation design. These efforts are staffed by serious people solving real problems inside real constraints, and this volume's treatment of them is governed by the explain-don't-judge commitment: the conditions Part II documents about reform governance concern *how the system decides and evaluates changes* — whether constraints are named, whether success criteria are stated in advance, whether results are reported back — not the competence or intent of the people executing them.

1.7 The Self-Evaluation That Was

The coordination tier once had a strategic mirror. Beginning in 2005, the federal fire community conducted a Quadrennial Fire Review — explicitly modeled on the Department of Defense's Quadrennial Defense Review — a joint strategic assessment by the five federal agencies and their state, local, and tribal partners, evaluating current strategies and capabilities against the projected future environment. Iterations appeared in 2005, 2009, and 2014; the 2014 edition, published in 2015, was the last. The QFR was imperfect and unloved in the ways such documents are, but it performed a function nothing has replaced: it committed the community, on a public cadence, to stating what it intended to work on and assessing how the last cycle's intentions had fared. Its lapse — explicable by budget instability, political volatility, and the absence of any requirement to continue — means the coordination tier has operated for over a decade without a standing instrument that asks, on schedule, whether the system's capabilities still match its environment. The companion volumes documented the knowledge tension at the system level; the dead QFR is its coordination-tier expression, and several of Part II's conditions are precisely the findings a living QFR would have surfaced on cadence.

1.8 The Reorganization Overlay

Everything above now operates inside the 2025–2026 federal reorganization the companion volumes documented. At the coordination tier, the overlay is concrete. The agency administrator function — the accountable official whose delegation an IMT works under, whose strategy WFDSS records, and whose relationship with the team is one of the system's load-bearing trust instruments — is changing hands: Interior fire management

officers have been placed as unit managers carrying agency administrator authority, a population formed in fire operations rather than in land management administration, and arriving in the role without the AA-specific training, mentorship, or apprenticeship pathways the legacy system at least nominally provided. Geographic-area fire leadership has been restructured under the new service's chiefs while the Forest Service — whose program exceeds the combined Interior bureaus in scale — awaits the feasibility study's verdict on whether it follows, a sequencing that places every Forest Service participant in the coordination tier's interagency bodies in the position of co-operating, evaluating, and potentially being absorbed by the same structure, simultaneously. And the service itself is new enough that its coordination-tier identity is unformed: its people arrive carrying the cultures of the bureaus that formed them. None of this is a judgment; all of it is load — and Part II documents how it lands on machinery that was already carrying the conditions described there.

Part II — The Conditions

Twenty-seven documented conditions in six clusters, each explained with its mechanism and the local rationality of the actors inside it

2.1 How to Read the Conditions

FIGURE 3 · THE ALLOCATION SPINE

One spine: question, break, remedy

The conditions that fail the system and the instruments that repair it line up against the same four questions.

WHAT BREAKS IT	THE QUESTION	WHAT BUYS IT BACK
Sensing & Demand *the form can't carry the judgment*	1 **What does each incident need?**	**Group B** *shared awareness*
Allocation governance *no one owns the call*	2 **What's worth sending where?**	**Group A** *decision speed*
Teams *the label outruns the capability*	3 **What arrives when it's sent?**	**Group D** *capability under stress*
Learning *the change is never checked*	4 **Does the system learn?**	**Group E** *the learning machinery*

Across all four: Cluster I — the reorganization overlay · Group C — instruments that buy trust

"A system can fail at allocation while every triage decision is correct."

Each condition is stated, mechanized, and inhabited: what is happening, why it happens, and why the people doing it are behaving rationally — because a condition explained without its local rationality is an accusation, and accusations produce defenses rather than designs. Sourcing is marked: *[public record]* for conditions documented in published instruments, memoranda, or data; *[operational record]* for conditions documented in the author's direct experience across incident management, geographic-area, and agency roles; *[both]* where they converge. Operational-record conditions are offered as what they are — a senior practitioner's documented observation, the raw material every honest review begins with — and the verification list in Part III identifies which should be independently confirmed before external use. The clusters follow the allocation problem's four questions: sensing (S) and demand-side decisions (D) cover *what does each incident need*; teams (T) covers *what arrives when sent*; allocation governance (A) covers *what is*

worth sending where; learning (L) and identity (I) cover *does the system learn* — and Section 2.8 closes the Part by deliberately changing chairs.

2.2 Cluster S — Sensing: The Information the System Allocates By

FIGURE 4 · CLUSTER S · SENSING

The request spiral

When asks are gamed and nothing closes the loop, allocation rewards the better story rather than the greater need.

"Gamed asks, rational skepticism, better storytelling — and no loop to break it."

S-1. One form, many languages.

The ICS-209 gives every incident the same template and almost nothing else in common. Geographic areas have evolved different conventions for what the fields mean in practice — what counts as a threatened structure, how values at risk are characterized, what "projected" commits the writer to — and incidents vary in who writes it, how seriously, and with what fluency in how it will be read three levels up. The mechanism is the absence of any calibration loop: the form's users are never shown how their entries compared to outcomes, areas are never normed against each other, and the national readers compensate with informal discount rates learned by experience and applied unevenly. The local rationality runs through every level — the incident reports in the dialect its GACC rewards, the GACC tolerates the dialect because it knows how to read its own units, and nobody owns the national legibility problem because the form "works"

locally everywhere. The cost lands on exactly one chair: the allocator comparing apples described in six dialects, at 0400, at preparedness level 5. *[both]*

S-2. The form measures what sensors now see; the judgment it cannot carry is the scarce information.

Much of the 209's factual payload — perimeter, growth, structures within threat distance — is increasingly observable by remote sensing without asking the incident anything, and the trajectory is one-directional. What no sensor returns is the content allocation actually turns on: the quality of the strategy, whether the requested resources serve an articulated theory of the fire, whether this team on this unit with this administrator can convert four crews into a caught corner or only into presence. The mechanism is an instrument designed when the facts were scarce and the judgment was assumed; the environment inverted, and the form did not. The consequence is that the system's formal reporting channel is densest where information is cheapest and thinnest where it is dearest — so the dear information travels informally, by phone and reputation, accessible to allocators with deep networks and invisible to everyone else, which quietly converts allocation from a process into a relationship economy. *[both]*

S-3. The request spiral: gamed asks, rational skepticism, better storytelling.

The honest version of a resource request is a crux-of-strategy statement: *two days of moderating weather opens a window on the piece of line that decides this fire; four crews for four days takes it*. Requests of that form — situation, action, purpose, the full grammar — are the system's highest-value signals and its rarest. The degraded version is insurance: ask for more than needed, for longer than needed, because partial fills are expected, because competing incidents are over-asking, and because the failure narrative — *we would have succeeded with more, for longer* — is career-safe in a way that a precise, falsifiable request is not. Allocators respond rationally: they discount. Requesters respond rationally to the discount: they inflate, or they sell — and the competition migrates from accuracy to narrative, because no evaluative criteria or thresholds are published against which a request could win on precision. The spiral has two rational ends and no villain; its cost is that the system's scarcest commodity at PL5 — believable demand signals — is manufactured nowhere. *[operational record; the structural logic is general]*

S-4. No allocation feedback loop.

When the four crews are granted — or denied — nothing in the system returns to ask what happened: whether the window was real, whether the line was caught, whether the denial's consequence matched the denier's assumption. Individual after-action processes exist for incidents; none exists for *allocations*. The mechanism is institutional: the allocation function sits between organizations, so its outcomes belong to no one's

performance record, and a brokerage that is never scored cannot calibrate its brokers, its requesters, or its criteria. The consequence compounds S-1 through S-3: the discount rates stay informal, the storytelling stays profitable, and the system's allocation judgment improves only at the speed of individual careers — then retires with them. *[operational record]*

2.3 Cluster D — The Demand Side: The Decisions That Define What Incidents Ask For

D-1. The agency administrator's strategy is shaped by a portfolio of pressures the system neither names nor offsets.

The strategy an incident pursues — and therefore everything it requests — is set in the agency administrator's decision, and that decision is influenced by factors the doctrine does not acknowledge: career consequence calculus, the administrator's last fire and what it taught or scarred, the unit's political and cultural climate, internal incentives and their alignment or misalignment with the agency's stated mission, and — load-bearing and unmeasured — the administrator's trust in the incoming team. None of this is corruption; it is what decision-making under accountability looks like everywhere, and the companion volumes' entire treatment of local rationality applies. The condition is not that the pressures exist but that the system pretends they do not: the decision-support instruments document the chosen strategy's rationale, not the pressure field that selected it, so the variance among administrators — which every experienced IC navigates as the incident's true terrain — is officially invisible, unteachable, and uncorrectable. *[both]*

D-2. Suppression repair is half the commitment and none of the prioritization.

The work after containment — repair, rehabilitation, the closeout an administrator will live with for years — routinely consumes incident management capacity on a scale comparable to the active fire, and the allocation machinery prices almost none of it: priorities, drawdowns, and rotations are tuned to flame, so the back half of every commitment is paid out of an accounting nobody keeps. The local rationality is symmetric — administrators reasonably want the team that broke the ground to repair it; teams reasonably resent invisible weeks; coordinators reasonably triage by what is burning — and the cost is a systematic underestimate of what each assignment actually withdraws from the national bench, which corrupts every downstream availability calculation. *[operational record]*

D-3. Agency administrator authority is expanding faster than agency administrator formation.

The reorganization has placed Interior fire management officers in unit-manager roles carrying full administrator authority — a population formed in operations, now holding the land-judgment seat — without AA-specific training, mentorship, or apprenticeship. The legacy pathway was itself uneven, as the companion volumes documented; the present condition is its replacement by no pathway at all. The predictable result is divergence: strategy variance among units will widen along the axis of each administrator's formation — operations-formed administrators defaulting to the grammar they know — at precisely the moment the strategy decision carries the system-level seam the volumes documented. The condition is stated without prejudice to the individuals, who did not design their own preparation; it is a formation-pipeline observation, identical in structure to the team conditions in the next cluster. *[both]*

D-4. The relationship capital behind the administrator function is thinning.

The legacy administrator — whatever else was uneven — was frequently *local*: years on the unit, known to the county, fluent in the community's history with fire and with the agency. Mobility, turnover, and the reorganization's reshuffling are producing administrators who arrive from outside with neither the relationships nor the local fire history, and the function's informal load-bearing elements — the sheriff who takes the call, the rancher who opens the gate, the community meeting that holds — thin accordingly. This is not nostalgia; it is an asset-class observation: the system has always run partly on relationship capital it never inventoried, and capital that is not inventoried is not replaced when it walks. The incident-level consequence is concrete — teams increasingly supply the local-trust function from their own liaison capacity, one more unpriced demand on the same bench. *[operational record]*

2.4 Cluster T — Teams: What Actually Arrives When It Is Sent

T-1. Complexity cannot be appreciated from below it.

The foundational condition, from which most of this cluster follows: experience with less complex incidents does not confer understanding of more complex ones, because incident demands do not scale linearly — some dimensions scale logarithmically, others exponentially, and the transitions are felt, not extrapolated. A team that has succeeded repeatedly at one tier has learned, correctly, that it is competent at that tier; it has learned nothing about the tier above, and — the mechanism that makes this condition

dangerous — it has no way of knowing that, because the absence of an experience is invisible from inside it. The *Operational Leader's Field Guide* treats this as a core property of complex operations: novelty must be *recognized* before it can be managed, and recognition is a trained capability, not a byproduct of confidence. The condition is offered without any judgment of the teams it describes, who are competent, motivated, and behaving exactly as competent, motivated people behave when handed a label that says they are ready. *[both — the scaling claim is established in the complexity literature; the operational expression is the author's record]*

T-2. The consolidation relabeled capability instead of developing it.

The CIMT transition's rationale was honest — Section 1.5 stated it at full strength — and its method had a gap the rationale never addressed: Type 2 command and general staff were transitioned to Complex qualification through coursework or a field evaluation, not through the developmental progression that builds performance under complexity — *do it slow, do it at speed, do it at speed under stress, do it at speed under stress consistently*. Teams whose formation never included the top tier were certified for it administratively, then assigned to it operationally, and they responded the only way capable people can: by innovating and adapting on the fly — adaptations drawn from a skill set the tier above had never shaped, exercised without guidance, and uncorrected because (T-4) no standard existed to correct against. The condition is the system-design point, not a performance accusation: the system asked its people to bridge with improvisation a gap that doctrine says is bridged with development, and then did not watch what the improvisation produced. *[both]*

T-3. The top of the bench is dulling from underuse.

The consolidation's mirror-image effect: the relatively few legacy Type 1 organizations — whose edge was built and maintained by repeated exposure to the most complex incidents — now draw assignments from a single national rotation that delivers mostly incidents below the tier their capability was formed for. Skills that are not exercised against their design load decay quietly: the muscle memory of true complexity — the tempo, the simultaneity, the failure modes that only appear at scale — atrophies while every individual assignment goes fine, and the atrophy is masked by exactly that fineness. The author's operational record states it concretely: across recent seasons, most of an experienced operations section had never worked an incident at the threshold of true complexity until a 2026 assignment that sat at the bottom of that threshold — and disciplines that sound load-bearing in genuine complexity ("workarounds don't work"; *the outcomes are what we get, the process is what we do*) register as noise to professionals who have never seen the conditions that make them true. The system has, in effect,

averaged its team capability: lifted the label of the lower tier, fed the upper tier a diet that erodes it, and measured neither. *[operational record; rotation structure public record]*

T-4. The practice fallacy.

The national-level explanation for capability differences among teams — that low-volume areas' teams underperform because they get too few assignments — carries an assumption the learning literature rejects: that repetition alone builds skill. Practice without a standard, without assessment against the standard, and without targeted correction of the highest-value gaps does not improve performance; it entrenches whatever is being practiced — practice makes *permanent*. The mechanism by which this fallacy persists is that it is half true — exposure is genuinely necessary — and its policy expression (route more assignments to low-volume teams) is administratively easy, while its missing half (define the performance standard, assess against it, develop against the assessment) is exactly the machinery the qualification system has historically lacked and the IPTM effort is only now attempting to build. Until that half exists, assignment-spreading redistributes experience without manufacturing capability, at the cost of T-3's atrophy on one end and unexamined entrenchment on the other. *[both — the deliberate-practice finding is established literature]*

T-5. "A team is a team" is asserted; the team literature says otherwise, and the home-unit math was never done.

Two dogmas arrived with the consolidation era. The first — that ad hoc assemblages of qualified individuals perform equivalently to intact teams — is contradicted by decades of team-performance research: shared mental models, transactive memory, and trust built through repetition are measurable performance assets, ad hoc teams require specific compensating structures the system has not specified, and the assertion has functioned as permission rather than as a tested claim. The second — that teams should be smaller and more nimble — may even be right, but it was adopted without ever asking the question that would make it answerable: *what does the system expect a team to deliver to a home unit, how many people in which functional roles does that expectation require, is the expectation realistic, and what is the consequence to the unit when it is not met?* The roster number was set by the supply constraint and the efficiency argument; the demand side — the expectation math — was never published, so the system cannot say whether its standard configuration is a design or a hope. *[both — team-performance findings are established literature; the absent expectation analysis is public-record by omission]*

T-6. The scarce-specialist arithmetic. Converting every large-fire team to a single configuration standardized the roster against positions the system does not possess in roster quantity: air operations branch directors, human resources specialists, and a handful of other functions exist in numbers sufficient for the old top tier, not for every

team carrying the new label. The arithmetic resolves the only way it can: the same individuals serve a primary team and backfill others, their duty cycles concentrate, and the load lands heaviest on exactly the functions — aviation, human resources, safety — where fatigue carries the sharpest consequences. The condition is stated as structure, not as a wellness claim: the system created more demand nodes than it has specialists, no instrument measures the resulting individual duty-cycle concentration, and unmeasured concentration in critical functions is a risk posture, whatever its current cost turns out to be. *[both — the position scarcity is public record; the duty-cycle pattern is operational record]*

T-7. The rest policy that produced a side economy.

The seven-day post-assignment pause — teams stand down from the rotation after an assignment, intended to improve home-unit support and member recovery — assumed that a team's members rest when the team rests. The roster reality is otherwise: a substantial share of team membership, concentrated in functions like safety and logistics, consists of administratively determined hires and retirees whose participation is income, and whose rational response to their team's pause is to mobilize with a different team — which the qualification system, built on individual credentials, fully permits. The policy's effect on its intended population is therefore largely ceremonial: the pause restructured *team* availability while individual exposure continued through cross-team assignment, an informal secondary market in scarce positions that no one designed, no one tracks, and — the prior season's record suggests — the system abandons anyway when demand breaks through, which it did. The condition exemplifies a pattern this volume returns to: a policy aimed at a real problem, designed against the org chart instead of the incentive field, producing a workaround economy that defeats it invisibly. *[operational record; policy itself public record]*

T-8. Once qualified, always qualified — in an environment that no longer matches the qualification.

The qualification system certifies a capability at a point in time and, for most positions, never revisits it: no recurrent training requirement, no recalibration as doctrine, technology, fire behavior, and the legal-political environment shift beneath the credential. Every other condition in this volume *is* that shift — the reorganization, the consolidation, the strategy seam, the sensing inversion — and the workforce navigating it is formally presumed current by virtue of evaluations completed under conditions that no longer exist. The system's one recent gesture at realignment — the terminology revision distinguishing direct suppression from indirect confinement strategies — illustrates the gap rather than filling it: a vocabulary change, issued without the calibration training that would make the distinction operationally meaningful, and received in the field as

confusion wearing the costume of clarity. The condition's cost is silent and compounding: credential drift is invisible until an incident audits it. *[both]*

2.5 Cluster A — Allocation Governance: Who Decides What Is Worth Sending Where

A-1. Geographic-area preference is locally rational and probably locally effective — and nationally unexamined.

Geographic areas prefer their own teams: known assets, established relationships with administrators, fluency in the area's fuels and fire behavior, no relationship-building tax on either side. The preference is defensible on its face — a credible case can be made in any geographic area that local familiarity improves performance, and practitioners in every area make it — and it interacts badly with the national system in two ways the system has never reconciled. It starves outside teams of the exposure the national rotation exists to provide, feeding the very capability gap (T-4) the national level then attributes to insufficient practice; and it has never been tested, in either direction — the system possesses no evaluation that would show whether local familiarity's benefits exceed the portfolio costs of a balkanized rotation, so the argument persists as competing intuitions with mobilization consequences. *[both]*

A-2. The centralization ratchet.

National-level control over allocation has expanded — thresholds revised so that national coordination directs more, at lower preparedness levels, than the doctrine's original support-not-command boundary contemplated. Embedded in the expansion is an assumption the system has never demonstrated: that the national level possesses better allocation knowledge than the geographic areas, and exercises it in full consideration of impacts the areas can see and it cannot. The ratchet's mechanism is self-sealing: centralization's results are not measured against any baseline, so disappointing outcomes cannot be attributed to it — and the institutional response to disappointing outcomes under centralization is, observably, more centralization. The local rationality is real on both sides: national coordinators genuinely face portfolio problems no single area can see — simultaneity, national drawdown, political visibility — and areas genuinely hold ground truth the national picture's instruments (Cluster S) cannot carry. The condition is not that either level is wrong; it is that the boundary between them is moving in one direction, on an untested theory, without an evaluation that could ever move it back. *[both]*

A-3. The credibility account is overdrawn.

Among field and regional practitioners there is a documented, widespread disbelief that the stated rationale for national allocation decisions is the operative rationale — a skepticism earned, in the practitioners' experience, by repeated divergence between announced reasons and observed patterns, and never repaired, because the system has no practice of owning its allocation and reform failures: outcomes are not reviewed (S-4, A-2), responsibility for major initiatives diffuses across consensus bodies, and the consolidation's unexamined results (T-2, T-3) sit in recent memory as the type case — a national change whose stated problems were real, whose effects were never evaluated, and whose accountability evaporated into the org chart. The mechanism deserves its Bayesian statement: disbelief is the *rational* posterior for an observer who has repeatedly seen rationale and behavior diverge without acknowledgment; restoring belief requires not better messaging but visible ownership — stated criteria, published evaluations, and someone answerable when they diverge. Until then, every national decision pays a credibility tax that compounds the request spiral (S-3) and the federation tension the companion volumes documented. *[operational record; stated as perception-with-mechanism, not as adjudicated fact]*

A-4. Allocation has no published criteria, no thresholds, and no iteration.

The priority decisions that move the system's scarcest resources are made against criteria that exist — experienced coordinators are not arbitrary — but are not published in evaluable form: what a request must demonstrate, what threshold separates fill from deny, how competing values are weighed, and how the criteria are revised when they misfire. The absence is the upstream cause of half this register: without published criteria, precision cannot beat narrative (S-3), denials cannot be audited (S-4), centralization cannot be scored (A-2), and credibility cannot be rebuilt (A-3), because there is nothing public against which any of those would be measured. The local rationality of the absence is candor about discretion — coordinators reasonably resist criteria that would bind judgment to a checklist in a domain that defeats checklists — and the design answer the absence ignores is that criteria can be published as *judgment structures with stated weights and revision logs* rather than as formulas; the choice has never been between checklist and silence. *[both — the absence is public record; its consequences are operational record]*

2.6 Cluster L — Learning: How the Coordination Tier Governs Its Own Changes

L-1. Solutioneering at national scale.

The recurring reform pattern: the system names a problem and simultaneously names, as its solution, the thing it already intended to do — without evidence that the named problem is the operative problem, and without any commitment to evaluate whether the change addressed it. The actors are well-intended; that is precisely the condition's mechanism. People with implementation authority experience their diagnosis as obvious, the consensus process ratifies what its members arrive carrying, and the absence of evaluation means the system never receives the corrective signal that would discipline the next diagnosis — which is the *Operational Leader's Field Guide*'s wicked-learning-environment problem operating at national scale: an environment whose feedback is delayed, confounded, or absent teaches its inhabitants confidence without teaching them accuracy, and institutions in such environments do not learn from experience, they merely accumulate it. The terminology revision of T-8 is a small instance; the consolidation's development gap (T-2) is a large one; and the pattern's signature — problem statement and solution announced in the same memo — is checkable in the public record. *[both]*

L-2. Constraint-shaped reform without constraint honesty.

The reforms in motion — next-generation task books, team reconfiguration, rotation redesign — are designed within the system's current constraints, which is unavoidable and not the condition. The condition is that the constraints are not named: the reforms are presented as designs rather than as *best-available-under-X* — the formulation that would read "if we could, we would do this; we cannot, because of these constraints; we therefore do this instead; here is how we will know whether it worked; here is when we will report back." The difference is not rhetorical. The unnamed-constraint version forecloses the constraint itself as a reform target, immunizes the design against evaluation (since its actual success criterion — fit-to-constraint — was never stated), and teaches the field that announced changes are verdicts rather than experiments — which is how a workforce learns to wait out reforms instead of working them. *[both]*

L-3. The strategic mirror is dark.

Section 1.7 documented the Quadrennial Fire Review's lapse after 2014. Its coordination-tier consequence is specific: every condition in this register is the kind of finding a standing quadrennial assessment exists to surface, prioritize, and track — and for over a

decade no instrument has asked the community, on cadence and in public, what it intended to improve and how the last cycle's intentions fared. The explanations are real — budget instability, political volatility, no statutory requirement — and the effect is what the author's notes name plainly and this volume adopts as the cluster's summary: a system that reads as rudderless not because no one is steering, but because nothing records where the helm was set or whether the heading was held. *[public record]*

L-4. The breaking rate is not admitted, so it is not managed.

The coordination tier's degradation is now faster than its historical baseline — the conditions in this register interact and compound, several (T-6, T-7, A-3) are visibly past their margins in hard seasons, and the prior season's record includes load breaking through policies designed to contain it. The system's institutional posture remains, publicly, that the machinery is sound and the seasons are hard — a posture each participating institution rationally maintains because admitting systemic breakage invites blame for it, no body owns the system as a whole, and consensus structures cannot speak about themselves. The cost of the unadmitted rate is that every repair must be argued from scratch against an official baseline of soundness, which prices honest reformers as alarmists — and, per the futures analysis, a system that cannot name its own degradation has pre-selected the discovery mechanism: catastrophe, in someone else's framing, on someone else's schedule. *[operational record; stated as assessment]*

2.7 Cluster I — Identity and the Overlay: The Reorganization Lands on the Coordination Tier

I-1. The new service has authority without identity.

The U.S. Wildland Fire Service's coordination-tier leaders arrived carrying the cultures that formed them, and in the absence of a defined service identity — doctrine, norms, a shared account of what the institution is for — each reasonably defaults to the grammar of a home bureau: the service risks operating as a federation of predecessor cultures, its coordination-tier behavior varying by the lineage of whoever holds each chair. The condition is ordinary for new institutions and consequential for this one, because the coordination tier runs on predictability: administrators, partners, and teams calibrate to institutional behavior, and an institution whose behavior varies by incumbent cannot be calibrated to — it can only be experienced, one incumbent at a time. *[operational record; consistent with the companion volumes' system-level findings]*

I-2. The pending Forest Service question contaminates the coordination tier's evaluations.

The feasibility study's open question — whether the Forest Service program joins the new service — places every Forest Service participant in the coordination tier's interagency machinery inside a structural conflict the system has not acknowledged: they co-operate the bodies, contribute to the evaluations, and would be organizationally subordinated by the outcome those evaluations inform — into leadership structures already staffed, by people who in many cases managed smaller programs than their prospective subordinates. No information exists about how absorption would work, what positions would become, or what "nobody loses rank" would mean in practice for, say, geographic-area chief seats — and senior people facing unpriced subordination behave the way senior people everywhere behave: they discount the future, they hedge, and the most marketable consider exits, which converts the question's mere pendency into a present-tense talent risk. The condition requires no bad faith on any side; it is the same evaluation-integrity finding the companion volumes made about the feasibility study generally (K-3, F-3), expressed at the coordination tier: *the system is asking people to neutrally evaluate an arrangement that would subordinate them, without independent criteria, and it will get the evaluations that incentive structure produces. [both]*

I-3. The coordination tier is where the federation tension is spent in real time.

The companion volumes documented coordination capital as the alliance's currency; the coordination tier is the till. Every condition in this register — the dialect problem, the request spiral, the credibility account, the centralization ratchet, the consolidation's unexamined results — is experienced by state, tribal, and local partners as data about federal reliability, weekly, at the working level where master agreements become actual crews on actual fires. System-level trust is not rebuilt at the system level; it is rebuilt here or nowhere, one believable 209, one explained denial, one owned failure at a time — which is the structural reason this volume's subject is the near-term track. *[both]*

2.8 The Same System From the Other Chairs

The register above is written substantially from the chairs its author has occupied — the incident management team, the operations section, the geographic area. Multi-level honesty requires sitting in four more, briefly and without condescension, because each sees conditions this register's vantage understates. *The home unit:* every militia mobilization is a vacant desk — the biologist's survey unfinished, the permit queue growing, the district's own initial attack thinned — and the unit pays the team system's costs while the credit accrues elsewhere; the never-done expectation math of T-5 has a mirror image here, equally never done: what may a home unit reasonably be asked to

surrender, for how long, against what relief? Supervisors who resist releasing people are not obstructing the system; they are the only actors pricing its true cost. *The national allocator:* the duty officer at NICC or the NMAC member at PL5 faces the portfolio problem no register written from below can feel — forty incidents' gamed signals in six dialects, simultaneity the areas cannot see, drawdown obligations, political visibility, and the certain knowledge that every denial will be remembered by its receiver and no fill will be remembered by anyone — and the skepticism this register documents as a spiral input is, from this chair, the only available filter; the allocator did not build the criteria vacuum either, and inherits its consequences nightly. *The state, tribal, and local supply side:* the majority of the system's capability flows through agreements whose holders watch the conditions above as counterparty intelligence — a compact state deciding how much to commit to the national pool this season is performing exactly the reliability arithmetic the companion volumes described, with this register as its evidence file. *The county at the end of the order:* allocation's final chair is the emergency manager or volunteer chief whose request went up the chain and came back unable-to-fill — for whom the entire apparatus this volume describes resolves into one fact, the resource that did not come — and who extends or withdraws trust in the system accordingly, at the next election, the next mutual-aid renewal, the next evacuation order their community does or does not believe. Every condition in this Part should be re-read once from that chair; it is the one the system exists for.

2.9 The Conditions Catalog

ID	Condition	Levels Implicated
S-1	One national form, six regional dialects; no calibration loop on the system's primary sensing instrument	Incident · GACC · National
S-2	Reporting is densest where sensing makes information cheap, thinnest where allocation needs judgment; dear information travels by relationship	Incident · National
S-3	Request spiral: insurance asks, rational discounting, storytelling competition; no published criteria a precise request could win on	Incident · AA · GACC · National
S-4	No feedback loop on allocation outcomes; the brokerage is never scored	GACC · National
D-1	AA strategy shaped by unnamed pressure portfolio (career, last fire, politics, incentives, trust in team); variance officially invisible	AA · Unit · IMT
D-2	Suppression repair consumes IMT capacity comparably to fire and is priced by no allocation instrument	AA · IMT · GACC
D-3	AA authority expanding without AA formation (DOI FMOs as unit managers; no training/apprenticeship pathway)	AA · Unit · National

ID	Condition	Levels Implicated
D-4	Relationship capital behind the AA function thinning; teams backfill local trust from their own capacity	AA · Community · IMT
T-1	Complexity cannot be appreciated from below; nonlinear scaling; novelty recognition is trained, not conferred	IMT · All
T-2	CIMT consolidation certified administratively what is built developmentally; improvisation filled the gap, unobserved	IMT · NWCG · NMAC
T-3	Legacy top-tier capability dulling on a rotation below its design load; atrophy masked by routine success	IMT · GACC · National
T-4	Practice fallacy: repetition without standard, assessment, and targeted correction entrenches rather than improves	National · NWCG · IMT
T-5	“A team is a team” contradicts team-performance literature; home-unit expectation math never performed	NWCG · IMT · Home unit
T-6	Standard configuration demands specialists (AOBD, HRSP) the system lacks at roster scale; duty-cycle concentration unmeasured	IMT · National
T-7	Seven-day pause restructured team availability while AD/retiree economics continued individual exposure via cross-team mobilization; abandoned under load	IMT · National
T-8	Once qualified, always qualified, while the environment moves; terminology revision without calibration as the type case	NWCG · IMT · AA
A-1	GACC own-team preference locally rational, possibly locally effective, nationally untested in either direction	GACC · National · IMT
A-2	Centralization ratchet: thresholds lowered, theory of superior national knowledge untested, results unmeasured, disappointment answered with more centralization	NMAC · GACC
A-3	Credibility account overdrawn: rational disbelief in stated rationale; no ownership practice for allocation and reform failures	National · All
A-4	No published allocation criteria, thresholds, or revision log; discretion defended as the alternative to checklists, as if those exhausted the options	NMAC · GACC
L-1	Solutioneering: problem and pre-chosen solution announced together; no evaluation; wicked learning environment at national scale	NWCG · NMAC · Agencies
L-2	Constraint-shaped reform without naming constraints, success criteria, or report-back commitments	NWCG · Agencies
L-3	Quadrennial Fire Review lapsed after 2014; no standing strategic self-assessment on cadence	Agencies · National

ID	Condition	Levels Implicated
L-4	Accelerating degradation officially unadmitted; repairs argued against a baseline of soundness; discovery mechanism defaults to catastrophe	All
I-1	USWFS coordination-tier authority without institutional identity; behavior varies by incumbent lineage; partners cannot calibrate	USWFS · All
I-2	Pending FS question places its people in unacknowledged evaluation conflict; subordination unpriced; talent exit risk present-tense	FS · USWFS · National
I-3	The coordination tier is where federation trust is spent and the only place it can be rebuilt	All levels

Part III — The Gap, Stated

Why the coordination tier matters, why it is the near-term track, and what this volume does next

3.1 The Gap

Assemble the register and the gap states itself. The system-level work documented institutions and incentives; the *Field Guide* equips the individual leader; and between them, the tier that connects capability to consequence is running on: sensing instruments that cannot carry the information allocation turns on, fed by a request economy that rewards narrative over precision; a demand side whose strategic decisions are shaped by unnamed pressures and increasingly made by administrators without formation for the role; a supply side whose capability labels were averaged by administrative action — the lower tier certified upward without development, the upper tier dulling downward without load — against qualification machinery that never rechecks anything; allocation governance that centralizes on an untested theory, against unpublished criteria, with an overdrawn credibility account and no feedback loop that could repair any of it; change governance that solutioneers without evaluation and reforms without naming its constraints, more than a decade after its last standing self-assessment went dark; and, overlaid on all of it, a reorganization that has put unformed authority, uncalibrated identity, and an unacknowledged evaluation conflict into the same interagency rooms. No single condition is fatal. Their interaction is the gap: a tier whose every feedback loop — sensing, learning, credibility, capability — is severed or degraded simultaneously, which means the coordination tier is not merely carrying problems; it has lost the machinery by which it would notice and correct them. That is the precise sense in which the system is breaking faster than before: not that more is going wrong, but that less of what goes wrong is being caught.

3.2 Why This Is the Near-Term Track

Three arguments, in ascending order of weight. *Consequence proximity:* the futures analysis operates on a twenty-year clock; the coordination tier operates on this season's. The conditions above are not risks to 2046 — they are the mechanism by which specific homes burn in specific counties this year, when the gamed request is discounted, the mislabeled team meets the incident above its formation, or the unfilled order arrives at the chair the system exists for. *Credibility economics:* the coordination tier is the system's public face at the working level — the tier where legislators' staff, county officials, state foresters, and tribal programs form their weekly assessment of whether the national

system works — and the companion volumes' entire federation argument cashes out here: coordination capital is spent and earned at the 209, the allocation call, and the owned or disowned failure, nowhere else. *The imposed-solution risk:* the futures analysis documented what happens to systems that lose credibility into a catastrophe's window — they receive solutions designed by whoever is standing closest, in the grammar of the emergency, with the seams drafted in a week. A coordination tier that cannot demonstrate self-correction is advertising for exactly that intervention, and the advertisement is read after every hard season. The coordination-tier track is therefore not sequential to the system-level work; it is concurrent and, on the season's clock, prior — and it generates the futures analysis's own signposts: whether the coordination tier's feedback loops are rebuilt or not over the next several seasons is among the cleanest observable indicators of which future is forming.

3.3 The Application Layer: Why Coordination Tier Repair Runs Through Operational Leaders

Every repair the eventual approach will propose shares a dependency the register makes explicit: it will be applied, or defeated, by the judgment of operational leaders — and the capabilities that determine which are precisely the disciplines the *Operational Leader's Field Guide* exists to build. The mapping is direct. The sensing cluster's repair is communication discipline: the crux-of-strategy request of S-3 is, in the *Field Guide*'s grammar, a complete operational communication — situation, action, purpose, plan, execution, result — and a workforce trained to that standard manufactures the believable demand signals no form redesign can. The teams cluster's repair runs through complexity appreciation and novelty recognition (T-1), deliberate development under escalating stress (T-2), and practice disciplined by standards and assessment (T-4) — the *Field Guide*'s developmental core, stated there at the leader's scale and needed here at the system's. The governance clusters' repair is decision quality and red teaming: published criteria with stated weights (A-4), pre-registered evaluation of changes (L-1, L-2), and the institutional habit of asking *what would tell us we're wrong* before the season answers — the same disciplines the system-level volumes applied to the reorganization, available off the shelf to any MAC group or working team willing to use them. And the learning cluster is the *Field Guide*'s wicked-environment argument at national scale: environments with broken feedback teach confidence without accuracy, and the counter-discipline — structured reflection, owned outcomes, process over results — is the same whether the unit is a division or a nation. This is the overt statement of what the register shows passively throughout: the coordination tier's gap and the operational leader's toolkit are the same subject at two scales, and any reform that arrives without the application layer will join L-1's inventory of changes that did not take.

3.4 From Appreciation to Definition

The register is the raw material; the discipline now governs its use. Part IV defines the problem the register demands — with the frames in circulation red-teamed first, because the coordination tier debate is already crowded with definitions that arrive carrying their answers — and Part V develops the approach against that definition, not against the register's loudest entries. The seam between the Parts is the same checkpoint the companion volumes enforced: nothing in the approach is permitted to reach back and edit the problem to fit a preferred answer.

3.5 Verification Items

Status after the citation pass. *Resolved and cited in the References:* the CIMT memorandum trail (NWCG Memos 22-003, 23-002, 25-002; NMAC Memos M2022-9, 2025-01, 2025-02; the IWDG Action Plan v3.0); the seven-day availability standard and its tracking mechanism (2025 Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization, Chapter 10) — noting that T-7's claims about the standard's behavioral effects and its suspension under load remain operational record; and the Quadrennial Fire Review series (2005, 2009, 2014, none since; the 2014 edition cited). *Still open before external use:* the NMAC threshold and preparedness-level revision history supporting A-2 (citable from NMAC correspondence and successive Mobilization Guide editions; the specific revisions should be pulled by date); the issuing instrument for the suppression-strategy terminology revision referenced in T-8 (likely the 2026 Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations or accompanying USWFS/NMAC correspondence — to be cited by exact section); the scope of the Interior unit-manager authority placements (D-3 — instrument citable from the reorganization record in the companion volumes); and the position-scarcity arithmetic of T-6 (rosterable AOBD and HRSP counts against CIMT configuration demand — obtainable from IQCS data if pursued). Conditions marked operational record — the request spiral's dynamics, the duty-cycle concentration, the credibility assessment, the atrophy observation — should be presented as practitioner findings pending the evaluations this volume argues the system should be running anyway; their verification mechanism *is* the recommendation.

Part IV — Defining the Problem

The frames red-teamed, the definition stated as four severed loops, and the coverage test against the register

4.1 The Standard

The acceptance criteria carry over from the companion volumes unchanged: *coverage* — the definition must account for all twenty-seven conditions, incorporated, contested, or designated, none dropped; *multi-level honesty* — it must hold from every chair in Section 2.8, not merely the chairs the register was written from; and *solution hygiene* — it must be writable by a reasonable analyst who would nonetheless choose a different approach, with Part VII demonstrating that the test passes. The frames in circulation are tested first, because each is institutionally sponsored, each is partially true, and the eventual approach will be contested by actors carrying them.

4.2 The Frames in Circulation, Red-Teamed

"The problem is not enough resources." The quartermaster's frame, native to every level: more crews, more aircraft, more teams, and the coordination tier performs. Its contribution is real — several conditions are at bottom scarcity facts (T-6 most directly) and demand genuinely exceeds supply in hard seasons. As a definition it fails on the register's own evidence: a system whose demand signals are gamed (S-3), whose capability labels are decoupled from formation (T-2), and whose allocations are never scored (S-4) converts added resources into added noise — more capacity fed into the request spiral raises the bidding, not the accuracy, and the conditions persist at any supply level. It also fails solution hygiene from the most comfortable direction: it is the one frame every actor can endorse without changing anything about themselves, which is precisely why it dominates testimony.

"The problem is not enough practice." The national-level explanation for team capability variance: low-volume teams underperform because they mobilize too rarely; spread the assignments and capability follows. Its contribution is the true half — exposure is necessary, and T-3 documents what its absence does even to the formed. As a definition it is the practice fallacy of T-4 elevated to policy: repetition without standards, assessment, and targeted correction entrenches rather than improves, and the frame's policy expression redistributes experience while manufacturing no capability — paying T-3's atrophy cost at the top of the bench to fund unexamined reps below it. The frame survives because its missing half — the performance-standard machinery — is hard institutional work, while assignment-routing is a dispatch decision.

“The problem is centralization.” The field and area frame: the national level has overreached; return allocation to the geographic areas and the system rights itself. Its contribution is A-2’s documented ratchet and the genuinely untested theory beneath it. As a definition it fails coverage comprehensively — the sensing conditions, the team conditions, and the learning conditions persist at any setting of the centralization dial — and it fails its own internal test: the geographic-area preference it would empower is itself untested in either direction (A-1), so the frame proposes to resolve an unevaluated centralization with an unevaluated decentralization. The honest version of its insight is not “move the authority down” but “stop moving authority anywhere without evaluation attached” — which is a different problem statement, and Part V’s.

“The problem is the consolidation.” The frame this volume’s likely readers arrive carrying, and the symmetric counterpart to the system-level volumes’ reorganization frame: CIMT broke the team system; restore the tiers and capability returns. Its contribution is the register’s largest cluster — T-2 and T-3 are real, documented, and this volume’s own findings. As a definition it fails the same way its sibling failed: reversal restores the system whose genuine problems the consolidation cited — the blurred tiers, the fragmented bench, the availability collapse — without restoring the developmental pipeline whose absence is the actual mechanism of T-2, and it spends a second round of change-absorption to do it. The consolidation is evidence inside the problem; it is not the problem, because the problem predates it: a qualification and development system that could relabel capability administratively in 2024 was a system that had already lost the machinery to certify capability developmentally, and that loss is the condition.

“The problem is the reorganization.” The newest frame: the coordination tier’s troubles arrived with the overlay of Part 1.8 and depart with its resolution. Its contribution is Cluster I, which is real and compounding. As a definition it fails on chronology alone — twenty-two of twenty-seven conditions predate September 2025, the QFR went dark a decade before the executive order, and the request spiral has no start date in living memory. The overlay is load on a degraded structure, not the degradation; a definition that waits on the structural question to resolve is a definition that defers the register to the next administration, which is L-4’s mechanism wearing analytical clothes.

4.3 The Problem, Defined

The problem, stated. The coordination tier of the American wildfire system — the tier that converts national capability into incident outcomes — has lost, simultaneously, the four feedback mechanisms by which a brokerage of its kind corrects itself, and because those mechanisms police one another, their joint failure is self-concealing: each severed loop hides the evidence of the others’ severance. The system’s degradation is therefore not primarily a deficit of resources, practice, authority placement, or structure — the

frames' candidates — but a deficit of *correction*: more goes uncaught, not because more goes wrong, but because the catching machinery is down. Four components, each anchored to the register.

P1 — Signal integrity: the system cannot generate believable demand

The sensing instruments carry the information that is becoming free and cannot carry the judgment allocation turns on; the request economy rewards narrative over precision because no published criteria exist that precision could win on; and no loop returns outcome information to calibrate writers, readers, or criteria. Demand signals — the scarcest commodity at preparedness level 5 — are manufactured nowhere and discounted everywhere, and allocation runs increasingly on the informal relationship network, which is excellent, unaccountable, and retiring. *(S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, A-4.)*

P2 — Capability integrity: the system cannot certify what it dispatches

The labels on the system's organizations have decoupled from the formation behind them — certified upward administratively, dulling downward operationally, never rechecked as the environment moves — while the development machinery that would recouple them (standards, assessment against standards, progression under escalating stress, the team-design and staffing arithmetic) either does not exist or was never run. The allocator at the national desk is matching incidents to labels the system can no longer warrant, and the variance hides inside routine success until an incident audits it. *(T-1 through T-8, D-3.)*

P3 — Decision-rights drift: allocation authority moves without evaluation attached

Authority over what is sent where — and over the strategies that define what is asked for — is migrating: upward through the centralization ratchet on an untested theory of superior national knowledge, sideways through unexamined geographic preference, and into administrator chairs whose occupants' formation no longer matches the function, while the whole commitment (repair included) is priced by no instrument. The condition is directionless by design: the problem is not where the authority sits but that it moves, in every direction, with no evaluation that could ever certify a setting or move it back. *(A-1, A-2, D-1, D-2, D-3, D-4.)*

P4 — Learning collapse: the change governance cannot tell itself the truth

Reforms arrive as solutioneering — problem and pre-chosen answer in the same memo, constraints unnamed, success criteria unstated, evaluation never scheduled — inside a tier whose standing strategic self-assessment has been dark for a decade and whose institutional posture cannot admit its own degradation rate; the predictable harvests are

an overdrawn credibility account, a workforce that waits reforms out, and an identity-and-incentive overlay (the unformed service, the contaminated evaluation) layered onto machinery already unable to score itself. This component is the keystone: P1 through P3 are each repairable by instruments P4's condition prevents the system from honestly adopting. *(L-1, L-2, L-3, L-4, A-3, I-1, I-2, I-3.)*

What the definition refuses. It names no villain — every condition was built and is sustained by locally rational behavior, the consolidation and the centralization included, and the register's sharpest entries describe incentive fields, not failures of character. It does not choose a structure — P3 is deliberately agnostic between centralization and federation, and P2 between consolidated and tiered teams: both questions are decidable only by the evaluation machinery whose absence is the problem. And it does not dismiss the frames — each is incorporated as the partial truth it is, which is why each frame's sponsors should be able to sign this definition while disagreeing about everything downstream of it. Part VII tests whether they can.

4.4 The Coverage Test

Component	Register Conditions Accounted For	Treatment Notes
P1 — Signal integrity	S-1 · S-2 · S-3 · S-4 · A-4 (criteria absence, shared with P3)	All incorporated as constraints; S-3's spiral treated as two-sided rational equilibrium, not requester misconduct.
P2 — Capability integrity	T-1 · T-2 · T-3 · T-4 · T-5 · T-6 · T-7 · D-3 (shared with P3)	T-6/T-7 incorporated with their measurement absence flagged: both are evaluable claims awaiting the data Part V orders.
P3 — Decision-rights drift	A-1 · A-2 · D-1 · D-2 · D-3 · D-4 · T-8 (credential drift as authority-competence gap)	A-1 contested honestly: the geographic preference may be performance-positive; the condition is its untested status, both directions.
P4 — Learning collapse	L-1 · L-2 · L-3 · L-4 · A-3 · I-1 · I-2 · I-3	I-2 designated for careful handling: the evaluation-conflict finding implicates pending decisions and should be raised structurally, never personally. A-3 stated as rational perception with repair mechanism, not adjudicated fact.

Twenty-seven conditions, twenty-seven accounted for; multi-level honesty auditable against Section 2.8's chairs — P1 is written half from the allocator's seat, P2 carries the

home unit’s never-done math, P3 holds the administrator’s pressures without indicting administrators, and P4’s keystone claim is precisely the county’s experience of promises and outcomes diverging. Solution hygiene rests on one checkable property: a reasonable analyst could hold this definition and recommend pure structural answers this volume will not recommend — re-tiering the teams, reversing the thresholds — because the definition deliberately leaves both available pending evidence. The definition stands; the approach follows it, not the register’s loudest entries.

Part V — Developing the Approach

Design principles, the decision-rights map, the season package, and the structural options honestly costed

5.1 Design Principles

Seven principles, each derived from the definition and stated as a test. DP-1, Rebuild feedback before structure: no structural question in this tier — team configuration, centralization setting, rotation design — is decidable on present evidence, because the evidence machinery is the casualty; instruments that restore correction precede and outrank instruments that relocate authority. DP-2, Certify by demonstrated performance, not administrative transition: capability labels recouple to formation only through standards, assessment against standards, and progression under representative load — the discipline of *do it slow, at speed, under stress, consistently* — and any qualification action that bypasses that sequence is a relabeling, whatever the memo calls it. DP-3, Authority moves only with evaluation attached: every future change to where allocation decisions sit — up, down, or sideways — carries pre-registered success criteria and a scheduled review, or it does not move; the ratchet is broken by pricing its clicks, not by reversing its direction. DP-4, Design against the incentive field, not the org chart: the seven-day pause is the standing exhibit — policies that restructure formal availability while the income, credentialing, and career incentives run unchanged will be defeated by workaround economies, invisibly; every instrument below is therefore checked against the question *what does each affected actor rationally do next?* DP-5, Name the constraints, state the criteria, schedule the report: the reform-hygiene standard of L-2, adopted as a rule for this volume's own proposals. DP-6, Price the whole commitment: repair time, home-unit cost, and individual duty cycles enter the allocation arithmetic, because a brokerage that under-prices its withdrawals overdraws its bench by exactly the unpriced amount. DP-7, Build the application layer with the instrument: every item below depends on operational leaders' judgment to work — the crux-of-strategy request is a communication discipline, the exposure ledger is a development discipline, the allocation review is a learning discipline — and instruments deployed without the corresponding leader capability join L-1's inventory of changes that did not take. The *Field Guide*'s disciplines are not an appendix to this approach; they are its delivery mechanism.

5.2 The Decision-Rights Map

Actor	Decision Rights Relevant to the Approach	Cannot Decide
NWCG Executive Board and committees	Qualification standards, position task books, complexity analysis, performance standards (IPTM), the reform-hygiene standard for its own memoranda	Allocation priorities; agency delegation practice; funding
NMAC	National priorities and thresholds, rotation design, scarce-resource direction, publication of allocation criteria, allocation after-action practice	Standards and qualifications; agency administrator formation; home-unit release
Fire Management Board / agencies / USWFS	AA formation requirements, delegation instruments, militia release and incentive policy, duty-cycle data collection, the strategic review's revival	Consensus standards; state and tribal participation terms
Geographic area coordinating groups / GMACs	Area priorities and drawdowns, area-level criteria publication, 209 calibration practice, team development considerations in assignment	National thresholds; qualification standards
Home units and their agencies	Release decisions, the expectation math from the demand side, backfill investment	Team configuration; rotation design
IMTs / CIMTs themselves	Internal development progressions, request discipline, repair-phase transparency, after-action candor	Their own assignments; the standards they are measured by
States, tribes, and locals (via NWCG membership and agreements)	Participation terms, crosswalks, the supply-side counterparty assessment that prices everything above	Federal internal formation and delegation

Two readings shape the package. First, everything in Section 5.3 sits inside the first four rows' existing authority — no statute, no appropriation, no resolution of the system-level structural question is required, which is the package's political design: it asks no one to concede anything except the absence of evidence. Second, the map exposes the approach's real dependency — the consensus bodies must apply the reform-hygiene standard *to themselves*, and a tier whose change governance is the keystone problem will be tempted to adopt the package the way it adopts everything: announced, unmeasured, and waited out. DP-5 is therefore not one principle among seven; it is the one the others fail without.

5.3 The Season Package

Eight instruments, each executable within one fire year under existing authority, each repairing a severed loop, each cheap relative to the information it returns. SP-1, Publish the allocation criteria (NMAC, GMACs): the priority and fill/deny logic stated as a judgment structure — factors, weights, thresholds where they exist, explicitly reserved

discretion where they do not — with a revision log. Not a formula; the choice was never between checklist and silence, and publishing judgment's structure is how precision gets something to win on. SP-2, Score a sample of allocations (NMAC, GMACs): each season, a structured after-action on a sample of consequential fills and denials — what was assumed, what happened, what the criteria would have done — conducted under an explicit learning-not-blame boundary, results published in aggregate. The brokerage's first scorecard in its history, sized as a pilot. SP-3, Calibrate the sensing (GMACs, with NWCG): an annual 209 norming exercise across geographic areas — same scenarios, compared entries, published convergence — paired with adoption of a structured request standard for critical-resource asks: situation, the action requested, its purpose in the incident's strategy, the plan it serves, and what result will be reported back — the crux-of-strategy ask, made the format rather than the exception. SP-4, Open the exposure ledger (NMAC, GACGs): a maintained record of each team's actual incident-complexity history, consulted explicitly in assignment — development needs and atrophy risk named as assignment factors alongside availability — and paired with IPTM's emerging performance standards so that exposure becomes practice with a standard attached (DP-2 against T-2, T-3, T-4 simultaneously). SP-5, Do the expectation math (FMB and agencies, with home units): the never-performed analysis of T-5 — what the system expects a team to deliver, the functional staffing that expectation requires, its realism, and the home unit's cost and relief — commissioned, published, and adopted as the baseline against which configuration claims are tested thereafter. SP-6, Measure the duty cycles (agencies, NWCG data systems): individual-level assignment tracking across teams for the scarce specialist positions, reported before any policy responds to it — the T-6/T-7 claims converted from operational record to data, in either direction. SP-7, Bridge the administrator gap (FMB, USWFS, bureaus): a minimum formation package for new-authority administrators before peak season — the delegation, the decision instruments, the strategy seam, the trust mechanics — plus structured pairing with experienced administrators for the first season; not the apprenticeship the function deserves, but the bridge the season allows. SP-8, Adopt the reform-hygiene standard (NWCG EB, FMB, NMAC, jointly): every change memorandum from the tier's governing bodies states the problem's evidence, the constraints shaping the design, the success criteria, the evaluation date, and the report-back commitment — the L-1/L-2 repair, applied prospectively, including to this package: each SP item above carries its own stated criteria and a two-season review.

5.4 The Structural Options, Honestly Costed

Three structural questions hang over the tier, and the approach's position on each is the same: decidable at the two-season mark, on the package's evidence, not before — but the options deserve honest statement now, because the season package will be attacked as

evasion by partisans of each. *Re-tiering the teams* (the consolidation's reversal, done properly): restore differentiated organizations with developmental progression between tiers — defensible if the exposure ledger and performance standards show a capability gradient the single configuration cannot manage; costed honestly, it is a second team-system transition paid from the same change-absorption account, and undertaken without SP-4's data it would be the consolidation's mirror image — a structural answer to an unmeasured question. *Resetting the centralization dial* (in either direction): defensible when, and only when, SP-1's published criteria and SP-2's scored sample exist to define what better allocation means — at which point the A-1/A-2 argument converts from competing intuitions to a testable comparison, and DP-3 governs the move. *Reviving the strategic mirror*: a standing coordination-tier review on a two-year cadence — lighter than the QFR, scoped to this tier, publishing intentions and scoring the last cycle's — is the one structural change the approach recommends without waiting, because it is the institutional form of the package itself and the only instrument that makes the two-season decision points anything more than this volume's hope. The pattern across all three is the approach's signature: the structural questions are real, the register's evidence is insufficient to decide them, and the package exists to make them decidable — which is not deferral; it is the difference between deciding and guessing, purchased for one season's instrumentation.

Part VI — Red Team Assessment

Directed at this volume's own reasoning

6.1 The Author's Chairs Are a Bias Vector

This register was written substantially from the incident management and geographic-area chairs, by authorship whose formation is the legacy Type 1 system, and the predictable distortions must be named. The register over-samples what those chairs can see: the conditions are thickest where the author has sat (teams, requests, the credibility account) and thinnest where he has not (the national desk's constraints appear only in Section 2.8's deliberate correction). The T-cluster's atrophy and relabeling findings are the kind of conclusions a legacy-tier practitioner is identity-positioned to reach — they may also be true, but the reader should weight the conjunction. The credibility condition (A-3) is the riskiest entry in the register: a practitioner's assessment of institutional believability is itself downstream of the practitioner's position, and the volume's discipline — stating it as perception-with-mechanism rather than adjudicated fact — is the available remedy, not a cure. And there is a circularity to disclose plainly: several operational-record conditions would be verified by exactly the evaluations the approach recommends, which means the volume's author benefits, reputationally, if the package is adopted and vindicates the register. The mitigation is structural — the package's instruments are stated so that they can *refute* the register (SP-6 may show no duty-cycle concentration; SP-4 may show no complexity gradient), and Part VIII's falsification criteria commit to publishing either way.

6.2 Challenges to the Definition and the Approach

Four with real force. Goodhart's shadow over SP-1 through SP-3. Published criteria become targets: requesters will write to the rubric, 209 norming will standardize the dialects into a single optimized dialect, and the request standard will produce beautifully formatted insurance asks — measurement of a gamed system can simply professionalize the gaming. Response: partially conceded and designed against — the criteria are judgment structures with reserved discretion, the scored sample (SP-2) audits requests against outcomes rather than format, and the revision log exists precisely because first-draft criteria will be gamed; but the challenge stands as a standing maintenance cost, not a solved problem. The blame gravity of SP-2. Allocation after-actions in the current litigation and accountability climate will be discovered, subpoenaed, and weaponized; coordinators who suspect that will write defensively, and a defensive scorecard is worse than none. Response: the learning-not-blame boundary must be structural — aggregate

publication, protected raw records where law allows — and if it cannot be protected, SP-2 should be narrowed rather than performed theatrically; the design is stated, the risk is real. The measurement burden lands on the thinnest staff. Every SP item adds work to coordination centers and consensus committees already past margin (T-6's logic applied to the fixers); a package that overdraws the bench to measure the bench's overdraft has failed DP-6. Response: the package is deliberately sample-based and pilot-sized, and the burden test — each item costed in staff-hours before adoption — belongs in SP-8's hygiene statement; conceded as a binding constraint on scope. Centralization may be the correct response to exactly what the register documents. If team capability variance is real and unmeasured (P2), a rational national level *should* trust area self-assessment less and direct more — A-2's ratchet may be the system's immune response, not its pathology. Response: the strongest challenge in the set, and the approach absorbs it rather than rebutting it — the package does not reverse the ratchet, it instruments it (DP-3), and if SP-2's scored sample shows national direction outperforming, the volume's evident sympathies lose to its own machinery, which is the design.

Part VII — Dissenting Alternative

The system-is-coping reading, argued at full strength

7.1 The Dissent's Definition and Argument

A credible analyst holding this entire register can define the situation differently: *the coordination tier is not a broken system but a coping one — an under-resourced brokerage absorbing unprecedented load through informal mechanisms that work precisely because they are informal, and the register documents the friction of coping, not the mechanics of failure.* The supporting argument deserves full strength. The outcome record is the dissent's anchor: across the hardest seasons in the system's history, catastrophic *allocation* failures — the right resource existing, requested, available, and not sent — remain rare enough to be individually famous; initial attack succeeds at historic rates; and the season totals, grim as they are, are driven by regime and exposure, not by the brokerage. The informal network the register treats as a fragility is, on this reading, the calibration mechanism: experienced coordinators' discount rates *are* the learning loop, relationship-borne judgment *is* the dear information channel, and formalizing it — published criteria, scored samples, norming exercises — would bureaucratize a trust system into a compliance system, trading flexible judgment for gameable rubrics (the red team's Goodhart point, wielded as the dissent's sword). The consolidation, on this reading, solved the problem it named: team availability was collapsing, rosters could not fill, and a single configuration kept organizations fieldable — the relabeling critique is a counsel of perfection from a tier the system could no longer afford to staff. The centralization is simultaneity's rational price. And the QFR died because it changed nothing — a strategic mirror the system looked into for a decade without acting is not obviously worth reviving. The dissent's approach follows: protect the informal system, resource it, resist the instrumentation, and let the people who have always made it work keep making it work.

7.2 What Would Decide Between Us

The readings share observables, stated in advance. If SP-2's scored sample shows allocation outcomes tracking the informal network's judgments better than any published structure — the formalization premise weakens decisively, and the package should retreat to measurement-only. If the exposure ledger and performance standards show no capability gradient by complexity history — the T-cluster overweighted formation, and the consolidation's defenders were right about more than availability. If the duty-cycle data shows no dangerous concentration — T-6 and T-7 recalibrate downward, with this

volume's acknowledgment on the record. Conversely: if the sample shows denials and fills resting on assumptions that outcomes routinely contradict, if the gradient is real, if the concentration is what the operational record suggests — the coping reading loses its anchor, because a system can cope its way through any individual season while compounding precisely the debts this register describes. The dissent's deepest weakness is disclosed the same way the main analysis's was: *the outcome record it stands on is generated by the very sensing and learning machinery this volume documents as severed* — a system that does not score its allocations cannot certify that its allocation record is good, and the dissent's anchor is therefore an assumption wearing a statistic. On present evidence this volume weights the dissent at roughly one in four — too substantial to dismiss, and structurally incapable of being right about the learning cluster, which is the keystone. Both readings, notably, can endorse the package: one expects vindication, the other expects refutation, and a package both sides can sign while expecting opposite results is the definition of a fair test.

Part VIII — Recommended Course of Action

The recommendation, implementation considerations, and what would tell us we're wrong

8.1 The Recommendation

Recommended COA: instrument now, decide at two seasons, institutionalize the mirror. Adopt the season package — SP-1 through SP-8 — in the current fire year, under the existing authority of the bodies named in Table 5–1, with each item carrying its hygiene statement and its staff-hour cost. Hold the three structural questions — team re-tiering, the centralization setting, and any further consolidation-era revision — open until the two-season review, and decide them then against the pre-registered criteria of Section 8.3, not against the next hard season's narrative. Establish the standing coordination-tier review on a two-year cadence as the package's permanent form — the one structural commitment made now, because it is the institutional embodiment of the approach and the only mechanism by which the two-season decision points outlive this volume's readership. The recommendation's logic is the definition's: the tier's problem is severed correction, the package is correction rebuilt at pilot scale, and every structural alternative — including the ones this volume's own register makes tempting — is currently a guess wearing conviction. One season of instrumentation converts the guesses to decisions; that is the entire trade.

8.2 Implementation Considerations

Five govern execution. *Sequencing inside the season:* SP-7 (the administrator bridge) and SP-3's request standard front-load before peak — they shape this season's decisions; the measurement items (SP-2, SP-4, SP-5, SP-6) run through the season and report after it; SP-1's criteria publish in draft before peak with the explicit label that the season will revise them. *The Goodhart maintenance:* criteria and standards are reviewed annually, adversarially — a standing red-team hour against the question "how is this being gamed" — with the revision log public; an unmaintained rubric is worse than discretion. *The blame boundary:* SP-2's after-actions operate under a written learning-not-blame charter modeled on the system's best safety-review practice, with aggregate-only publication; if counsel cannot protect the raw records, the sample narrows to denials only, which carry less litigation gravity. *The burden discipline:* every item's staff-hour cost is stated at adoption and tracked; any item exceeding its estimate by half is descoped at the season review rather than heroically absorbed — DP-6 applied to the package itself. *The application layer:* each instrument deploys with its training — the request standard taught

as communication discipline, the exposure ledger as development practice, the after-action as structured learning — because the package's instruments and the *Field Guide*'s disciplines are the same content at two scales, and the tier's history (L-1) is a catalog of instruments deployed without their application layer. The bodies adopting this package should treat leader development not as a parallel program but as the package's delivery system.

8.3 Inflection Points and Falsification Criteria

Inflection points: the two-season review (the structural questions are decided there, on the evidence, or the decision has been made by drift — and this tier's drift is measured in seasons, not authorization cycles); the first contested allocation under published criteria (its handling — revision, defense, or quiet abandonment of the criteria — is evidence about the tier's learning capacity, per the dissent's shared observables); the IPTM performance standards' arrival (SP-4 converts from ledger to assessment the season they land); and the system-level structural resolution (whenever the Forest Service question decides, I-2's conflict lifts and the coordination tier's evaluations should be re-baselined). What would tell us we're wrong: if the scored sample vindicates the informal network over any published structure, the formalization premise of P1 was overweighted and the dissent governs the sensing cluster; if no capability gradient appears by complexity history, P2's decoupling claim recalibrates and the consolidation's defense strengthens; if the duty-cycle and expectation data return unremarkable, the T-cluster's operational record was vivid rather than representative, and this volume says so in the two-season report; and if the package is adopted, hygiene statements and all, and the tier's reforms still arrive as solutioneering two cycles on — then P4 was deeper than instruments reach, and the honest conclusion is the one this volume least wants: that the coordination tier's correction machinery cannot be rebuilt from inside the consensus structure, and the system-level volumes' harder options return to the table. The criteria are stated now because the volume that indicted announced-and-unmeasured change owes the system a change it can measure. The register is on the record; the problem is defined; the package is addressed, costed, and falsifiable — and the discipline that carries it from here is the one the fireline already knows: *the outcomes are what we get; the process is what we do.*

References

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Management Team: Action Plan for Implementation v3.0; NMAC Memos 2025-01 (“Incident Management Team Standard Configuration and National Rotation”) and 2025-02 (“Complex Incident Management Team Standard Configuration”); NWCG Memo 25-002, “Archival of Type 1 and Type 2 Command and General Staff Position Qualifications”; the *2025 Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization*, Chapter 10 (the seven-day CIMT availability standard and its geographic-area tracking); NWCG PMS 310-1 and PMS 236; and the National Interagency Mobilization Guide. All are public record via nwcg.gov and nifc.gov. Works referenced:

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Movement II — What the Stakeholders Needed

Stakeholder priorities from the record of a significant wildland fire incident — and the seventeen instruments that answer them

About this volume. This is an incident-tier companion to the system-level body of work. It draws on approximately sixty interviews from the record of a recent significant wildland fire incident in the American Southwest — agency administrators, incident commanders and command staff, fire management officers, interagency partners, structural and safety professionals, dispatchers, employees who evacuated under fire, concessionaires, permittees, gateway businesses, and county, state, and national officials. All attributions are role-based; people appear here as the functions they held, never by name or unit. The volume runs the standing discipline in two movements: Part One is the appreciation — what each stakeholder class values, what hurt them, and what would have made the biggest difference, in their own lens. Part Two is the approach — seventeen instruments, each with an owner who can sign it, that convert the record into readiness. The weather on the next incident is not ours to choose; the instruments standing when it arrives are.

PART ONE — THE STAKEHOLDER RECORD

The appreciation: eleven stakeholder lenses, the five themes, the high-impact moves, and the discretionary-time portfolio.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose. The interview corpus from a recent significant wildland fire incident in the American Southwest has value far beyond the review that commissioned it: it is a rare, multi-perspective record of what roughly sixty people — agency administrators, fire managers, incident commanders, interagency partners, structural and safety professionals, dispatchers, employees who fled the developed area, concessionaires, local businesses, county and state officials, and national program leaders — actually needed from the system before, during, and after a bad outcome. This document synthesizes that record through the stakeholders' own lenses: what each group values most, what hurt them when the event went wrong, and what would have made the biggest difference.

1.2 The single largest finding. Across every stakeholder group, the dominant currency of the incident was not water, retardant, or crews — it was credible, consistent, timely information matched to authority that could act on it. Nearly every harm described in the corpus that was not caused directly by the fire was caused by a mismatch among those four properties: information that was credible but late, timely but contradicted within the

hour, consistent but not connected to anyone with authority, or authoritative but never communicated. The fire destroyed structures; these mismatches destroyed trust, and the trust losses outlasted the fire.

1.3 The five themes named in this analysis — trust, governance, communication, clarity and consistency, and urgency — all emerged unambiguously and are treated explicitly in Section 4. They are not five separate problems. They are five faces of one underlying asset: the pre-built connective tissue between people, authorities, and information that either exists before the event or must be improvised during it. Every stakeholder story of harm in this corpus is, at bottom, a story of improvising connective tissue under time compression.

1.4 The corresponding opportunity. Almost everything stakeholders said they needed can be built during discretionary time, at low cost, by people who already have the knowledge. Section 6 organizes those investments. Section 5 identifies the high-impact moves available during and immediately after an event — the moves that, on this record, separated the stakeholders who came out of the incident with strengthened relationships from those who came out with broken ones.

2. Method and Source Base

This synthesis draws on the interview summaries in the incident record: park executive leadership and agency administrators (including two comparator superintendents from other fire-regime parks), park and zone fire management, Type 3 through complex incident commanders and command staff, partner-agency forest and district leadership, regional and national agency fire leadership, structural fire, safety, utilities, facilities, and hazmat specialists, interagency dispatch, incident business and finance, the park public information officer, county emergency management and elected leadership, the state forester, concessionaire managers and operators, grazing permittees, a gateway business owner, and employees who personally evacuated or sheltered during the overnight escalation. Attributions are role-based to protect interviewees, consistent with the commitments made to them. Statements are presented as the stakeholders' perceptions and reported experience — that is precisely their value here; this is a document about what stakeholders need, and what they need is defined by how they experienced the event. Where multiple stakeholders independently described the same need or the same harm, that convergence is noted, because convergence across roles and agencies is the strongest signal this record offers.

3. Stakeholder Priorities — Through Their Own Lens

Each subsection answers three questions from inside the role: What do I value most? What hurt me when it went wrong? What would have made the biggest difference?

3.1 The Agency Administrator and park executive

What I value most. Life safety above everything — both comparator superintendents and the incident AAs return to it unprompted. After that: decision support I can trust (I am not a fire behavior analyst; I act on what my filter conveys); a checklist and trigger structure that reflects today's climate, not the historical "safe windows"; awareness of the political overlay, which is real but appears on no checklist; and protection of the park's mission — wilderness character, public access, the resource — which is why I am cautious with retardant and dozers in the first place.

What hurt. Wearing two hats — running the park and the fire simultaneously — until relief was improvised weeks in. A thin and ambiguous AA bench ("loose" qualification, in one deputy's word; only two qualified AAs at the park by his count). Receiving the world through a thin filter: the AA signs WFDSS, but the record shows the deliberation happening elsewhere and arriving as confirmation. A comparator superintendent's warning landed precisely on this record: the official decision record can lag the live decision, which destroys defensibility exactly when scrutiny arrives. And when the loss became iconic, the AA absorbed national-level attention with no rotation plan and a pre-scheduled vacation as the relief mechanism.

Highest-impact moves for me. A named, rotating AA bench with a relief cadence agreed before the season (the relief AA who served in August modeled it: two-day overlap, three days of meetings monitored before arrival, daily physical presence at ICP — he calls presence the single most decisive factor in decision quality). Trigger points and management action points written into the first decision, so that reaffirming a strategy is an act with criteria rather than momentum. A deputy with explicit proxy authority. And a preseason conversation that puts the political overlay and the "what if the checklist is green but July says no" judgment on the table before lightning does.

3.2 The fire management officer and duty officer

What I value most. Clear decision rights — who actually owns the strategy call on this zone, on this land, on this day. Tempo: administrative actions (ordering, notifications, WFDSS) starting immediately, because, as one duty officer put it, fire doesn't wait for the holiday weekend to end. Tools matched to the strategy: if the plan is a box, I need the road, the equipment access, and the contingency authorizations to build and hold the box.

And honest preservation of relationships with the interagency partners I will need every season for the rest of my career.

What hurt. Strategy selected before the on-scene size-up arrived — the operator riding toward the fire prepared for suppression was told to stand down by radio relay before anyone with eyes on the fire had reported. Decision rationale invisible to those executing: a key zone FMO recommended suppression, was told "this is a park fire, we're going this direction," and could never reconstruct the deliberation in between. Tool authorization that lagged conditions: closed-road access requested almost daily and granted "by then it was too late"; retardant requests relayed up and answered no, with the approval pathway itself unclear to the requesters. The quiet trade of capacity for relationship capital — not insisting on a Type 3 order to avoid straining the partnership — which everyone involved now recognizes as the wrong currency exchange. And the weather assumption (monsoon arriving) functioning as the plan's load-bearing wall with no explicit failure point when it didn't.

Highest-impact moves for me. Size-up before strategy, as doctrine, no exceptions for promising-looking starts. A decision record within 24 hours that names its assumptions (the monsoon), its triggers (spotting across the named feature), and its failure points ("how could this line fail?"). Pre-enabled conditional authorizations — retardant, mechanized equipment, closed-road access — staged in the fire management plan with the triggers that release them, so the toggle is hours, not days. And a norm that when my recommendation is overridden, I get the reasoning, on the record, because I am the one who will execute the alternative.

3.3 The incident commander and incident management team

What I value most. A reachable AA — this is the IC corpus's most consistent single need. Clear leader's intent, ideally face-to-face. The correct delegation of authority in my hand before conditions force decisions that exceed it. A values-at-risk list. An honest picture of what resources are actually on scene. Connectivity. And when I inherit a hazard area, authority over it that matches my accountability for it.

What hurt. The Type 3 IC who took command during the escalation could not reach the AA or anyone in the park organization during the acceptance window, had no alternate contacts, was emailed the wrong delegation (the CIMT's, not his), and mobilized without a resource list — while the fire moved from managed-fire context to structure-defense emergency. A stopgap team arrived to no incoming hazard briefing and built its picture huddled around a borrowed Starlink. A later safety officer fought for a week over whether the burned developed area was even within the IMT's delegation while personnel entered it outside IMT channels. Order confusion (ordered, canceled, still valid) cost a team hours during the most consequential window.

What worked — and should be institutionalized. The corpus contains a complete, working model, described independently by three IMTs: explicit full-suppression intent delivered personally by the AA; a values-at-risk list inside 48 hours; near-immediate authorization of retardant and dozers once requested; daily AA presence at ICP plus an embedded, co-located agency representative described as "invaluable"; AAs from multiple agencies sharing one trailer and one daily rhythm; and a structured two-day command transition. The teams that received this model describe a coherent, decision-quality incident. The teams that did not, describe chaos. Same fire, weeks apart. The difference was entirely connective tissue.

3.4 The interagency partner (forest leadership and zone staff)

What I value most. Being at the table at the moment of highest leverage — strategy selection — not after the fire reaches my boundary. The round-the-room norm: when the zone we jointly staff faces a strategy call, you ask me what I think, because my engines, my dispatch, and my people are already committed to it. Supportability raised early: if the plan is a managed box supporting a hundred-plus people, the purchasing, feeding, and dispatch conversation belongs on day two, not day ten. And messaging I can stand behind in front of my own public, because they will not distinguish between our agencies when they are angry.

What hurt. "It's a park fire." The district ranger with nearly five decades of service, accustomed to standing at the morning briefing as the on-the-ground AA presence, offered to serve and was told no. He was concerned about the strategy — location, weather, mixed conifer — and never spoke up, not because he chose silence but because the round-the-room never came to him. The deputy fire staff officer had to ask to be invited to the decisive call. The forest fire staff officer was excluded from planning meetings and the complexity analysis. Weekend silence between agencies sharing one operational zone. Then, when the fire crossed the boundary, the forest inherited the consequences of a strategy it had been excluded from selecting — and stood in front of furious publics alongside the partner who had excluded it.

Highest-impact moves for me. Codify the round-the-room: a strategy-selection protocol for the shared zone that requires documented zone-partner input before a manage decision, with the annual operating plan naming who must be in the room. Preseason joint leader's intent between superintendent and forest supervisor, revisited when national posture changes. Default invite lists for decision calls, maintained like a dispatch run card. The shared zone is operationally one thing; the event proved it must be governed as one thing.

3.5 The structural fire, safety, utilities, and facilities professional

What I value most. Integration before the emergency: a defined place for structural fire in the wildland incident's structure, because there is no SOP for it and we meet the incident organization for the first time mid-crisis. Hazard knowledge in the right hands before it is needed — the chlorine, the asbestos surveys, the electrical backfeed risk, the water system's real capacity — because I carry this knowledge and the incident does not know to ask me for it. Reachability when it matters: utility skills are 24/7 obligations in every other utility in America. And not being a single point of failure.

What hurt. The fire chief learned the developed area was burning from a ranger at the entrance station at 23:05, after driving through a known radio blind spot, hauling PPE for staff who had been flown over without it. The fire marshal was retasked from evacuation support to "Structure Protection Division" by a manager outside the incident organization — without the incident frequency, without knowing who he worked for, without an assignment, briefed off a map with the fire pointed at in the wrong place. The one person who knew the chlorine inventory pushed the warning through his wife's phone because his supervisor's phone was off for the weekend. The only person who could operate the electrical system stayed alone in a burning developed area because there was no second person. A chlorine response plan existed — built after a January leak — but the wildland firefighters who would trigger it did not know it existed. Sprinkler systems were locked out for backflow compliance with no fire-protection voice in that decision's loop. Twelve employees, most without fire training, spent the night at a station defending it with hose lines, and no leader attended their debrief.

Highest-impact moves for me. Site hazard intelligence packets — one page per system: chlorine locations and the plan's trigger, electrical isolation steps and backfeed risk, water system capacity and its failure behavior, asbestos survey index — staged at dispatch and built into the IMT in-brief template, so the knowledge arrives with the incident instead of chasing it. A structural–wildland integration SOP with one joint exercise per year. A 24/7 reachability roster for critical utility skills with named alternates. Radio interoperability resolved in the shop, not discovered on the hill. And a hard rule: anyone retasked into a fire role gets a frequency, a supervisor, and an assignment, or they do not deploy.

3.6 The dispatcher and incident business professional

What I value most. Being told what is happening — dispatch documents what it receives, and what it receives is what the system decided to share. Current charters and agreements, because an interagency center with an expired charter is running on habit. Working phones, network, and radios. A delegation on day one, not day four, because the AA–business relationship is, in one advisor's word, intimate, and ambiguity in it delays

every procurement the incident needs. Transparent, self-serve tracking so the field is not calling individuals for status.

What hurt. The center manager was not notified of the structure impacts during the night they occurred and learned the extent the next morning; she learned a complex IMT had been ordered when the receiving team called asking where its order was. The log gap everyone later scrutinized was an information-inflow gap, not a staffing gap. The interagency charter had been expired for over a year. The business advisor spent her first days effective only by force of personality because her delegation arrived on day four and the AA, overwhelmed, did not know what she could do for him. Vendors who fronted payroll waited through a shutdown for payment, calling her because the status inbox answered with boilerplate.

Highest-impact moves for me. Notification triggers that include dispatch in the consequence loop (structure impacts, team orders, IC transitions — dispatch hears within the hour). Charter and agreement renewal as a tracked preseason deliverable. Business delegation templates staged with the incident type, signed with the first team order. A posted, statused procurement tracker. None of this is expensive. All of it was absent.

3.7 The employee and responder on the ground

What I value most. Not dying — and not learning from a panicked runner that the calm briefing an hour ago is no longer true. Triggers I was told about in advance, so that "set" means something and "go" is not a surprise. Knowing who is in charge and being accounted for. Honest information over reassuring information, every time. And afterward: leadership in the room when I describe the scariest night of my life.

What hurt. At roughly 1500 a briefing said the fire would go north and the developed area was fine; minutes later a firefighter drove up shouting to get out. "Set" to "go" compressed to fourteen minutes on the notification system. The maintenance mechanic was told to take a coffee break and then got the bug-out knock before the coffee finished. Staff texted "we think we might die." The hotshot superintendent had to produce a photograph in the evening meeting to convince the command organization where the fire actually was. People rallied at a station that was never a designated safety zone for non-fire personnel. Evacuation plans had never been drilled. Afterward, the twelve who sheltered debriefed without leadership present, and no one has ever answered how the decision to leave them was made.

Highest-impact moves for me. Publish the trigger points to me, not just to operations — if spotting across the named drainage means we leave, tell me that on day two. Drill the evacuation once a season; the concessionaire who drilled annually evacuated cleanly. Maintain accountability that works without cell coverage. Replace reassurance with calibrated honesty ("we expect north spread; if that changes you will hear within minutes

via the mass-notification system"). And put a leader in every debrief, because the absence is itself a message, and the message is that what happened to me does not matter.

3.8 The concessionaire, permittee, and gateway business

What I value most. One clear point of contact — not five teams asking me for the same inventory through different people. Early warning consistent with operational reality: my livestock, my employees, and my inventory cannot move in fourteen minutes. Access protocols that survive personnel rotation, so the law-enforcement officer at the roadblock who has never met me knows the exception process. Continuity information after the flames: what is the status, when can I plan, what is the park's intent — because my business decisions cannot wait for perfect information. And being paid.

What hurt. The livestock operator was told at the 1500 meeting that everything looked good and reopening was likely by Sunday; hours later he was told the fire took off and to get the livestock now — from three hours away, through closed roads, to be denied at the entrance at 2200 with two of his employees unaccounted for and a radio report (wrong, it turned out) that they had fled into the backcountry. The concessions liaison describes the worst communication architecture she has seen in twenty years: multiple teams, duplicative requests, no single channel, until she built one herself mid-incident. The gateway lodge owner fed a hundred firefighters on a handshake while hearing the operation described as a control burn that was under control. The permittee was turned away at a roadblock by an officer unfamiliar with the local exception process. And after containment, a communication vacuum — the funding, urgency, and attention that were abundant during suppression evaporated, leaving hazard trees, fences, and water sources to a recovery that one permittee, citing a prior fire, expects to take years.

What worked — preserve it. The incident communication specialists who sent the permittee maps, briefing videos, and emails, and returned his calls — he names this, unprompted, as the thing that worked, and it measurably reduced his uncertainty-driven decisions. The fire archaeologist who served as a trusted bridge to the stakeholder worried about a historic cabin. The concessionaire's own annual drills, which produced a clean evacuation. These cost almost nothing. They bought the only goodwill in this section of the record.

3.9 The county, state, and elected official

What I value most. Not being surprised. The board chair learned the developed area was burning while at a national conference, by phone, after the fact — on an incident her emergency manager had been tracking for days. The park is my county's economic engine; when the media frames the incident by the iconic landmark rather than the affected district, the gateway economy parkwide bleeds too, so framing is a substantive interest, not vanity. I need to know who can lawfully push an evacuation alert in your jurisdiction

before the night we improvise it. And I need to answer my constituents' actual question — what was decided at the beginning, and why — which is exactly the question the public meetings were built not to answer.

What hurt and what worked. Hurt: late board awareness; alert authority improvised between the park PIO and the county on a judgment call; public meetings staffed by people prepared to brief current operations to an audience demanding the origin story, with the decision-makers conspicuously absent. Worked, by universal acclaim across this corpus: the daily 10:00 elected-official and cooperator briefing — the state forester, the board chair, and the AAs all volunteer it as the model. The county's river-corridor satellite alerting, built in discretionary time for floods, repurposed in hours for fire and chlorine. The forward-deployed county liaison standing quietly against the wall at the partner ICP. Pre-positioned relationships converted directly into operational capability; their absence converted directly into improvisation.

3.10 The regional and national program leader

What I value most. Weak-signal escalation that does not depend on me seeing a Facebook post. A managed-fire decision under an aggressive national posture is exactly the event my level needs surfaced — by criteria, not by social media. When national direction is issued ("line it and put it out"), I need an acknowledgment loop: evidence the direction reached the field, was understood, and is reflected in the decision record, because "it's a long way from here to a firefighter on the ground." And bench depth: with most regional directors and a third of line officers gone, the relationship infrastructure I once used to apply pressure simply was not there.

Highest-impact moves for me. Escalation criteria for managed-fire selections during elevated posture (notification with rationale within 24 hours, not discovery). National-direction acknowledgment captured in the incident decision record. Qualification and waiver discipline treated as a governance control rather than paperwork — the qualification ambiguity at the AA level was a quiet enabling condition for much of what followed. And honest accounting for what workforce reductions did to the bench, because the system's informal pressure-and-relationship mechanisms fail silently when the people are gone.

3.11 The public communicator

What I value most. Messaging that matches the decision record. The single most damaging communication event of this incident was not a missed press release — it was the terminology reversal: early public messaging said confine and contain; later talking points said full suppression from the start. Every stakeholder who touches the public — the PIO, the forest supervisor at the gateway-community meeting, the recovery operations lead facing displaced residents — independently identifies that contradiction as the

moment public trust failed and never recovered. I also need staffing reality acknowledged: one PIO carried a national-attention incident alone for nine days. And I need permission to be honest — the talking points told me to deflect the only question anyone was asking.

Highest-impact moves for me. A preseason strategy lexicon with plain-language explanations the public can actually hear ("confine and contain means we build a perimeter and burn to it; here is why and here is what would change our mind"), agreed across agencies that share a public. A decision-narrative policy: when the strategy changes, the public explanation changes with it, with the reason — because the record will surface, and the gap between message and record is the trust-killing instrument. A PIO surge roster triggered by evacuation, not by structure loss. And public meeting design that puts a decision-maker in the room prepared to address origin and rationale, because sending operations briefers to an accountability meeting pours fuel on it.

4. The Five Themes — Called Out Explicitly

Trust, governance, communication, clarity and consistency, and urgency were tested for in this synthesis and all five emerged — not as occasional notes but as the organizing structure of nearly every stakeholder's account. They are stated here as operating principles, each with its evidence pattern.

4.1 Trust

The pattern: trust is built in discretionary time, spent during the event, and the exchange rate is asymmetric — years of deposits, withdrawn in one contradiction. Internal: the district ranger who was never asked; the zone FMO overridden without explanation; the employees whose calm briefing was falsified within minutes; the twelve at the station whose debrief no leader attended. External: the public terminology reversal, named independently by at least four stakeholders as the single moment legitimacy failed; the concessionaire told everything looked good hours before the scramble; the gateway owner told it was a control burn under control. The counter-pattern is equally clear: where trust had been pre-funded — the county relationships behind the 10:00 call, the archaeologist's standing relationship with the historic-cabin stakeholder, the co-located AA trailer — it converted directly into speed and goodwill under pressure. Operating principle: every preseason relationship activity and every honest, calibrated message is a deposit; every reassurance that outruns the evidence is a loan against the account at ruinous interest.

4.2 Governance

The pattern: authority, accountability, and knowledge repeatedly sat in different hands, and the gaps were bridged by improvisation. AA qualification described as "loose" by the people holding it; delegations that lagged (the wrong DOA emailed to the Type 3 IC; the forest's delegation executed mid-tour; the business advisor's on day four); a shared zone operated as one organization but governed as two at the only moment it mattered; a quasi-IMT for reentry with no charter and no incident-trained staff; an interagency dispatch center on an expired charter; a district-manager role built on influence without line authority, which functioned in peacetime and blurred under compression (it was that role, outside the incident organization, that retasked the fire marshal). Operating principle: every place where governance is informal is a place where the event will demand improvisation; inventory those places deliberately, in daylight, and either formalize them or pre-script the improvisation.

4.3 Communication

The pattern: three distinct failure layers, usually conflated, each needing different fixes. Connectivity — the physical layer: the radio blind spot from the gateway lodge to the entrance station, the LE radios that could not talk to wildland operations, the command group huddled around a borrowed Starlink, the supervisor's phone off for the weekend. Architecture — who tells whom: dispatch not told of structure impacts; the board not told at all; five teams asking the concessions office the same question; the chlorine warning routed through a spouse. Translation — decisions into meaning: triggers that never reached employees; "everything looks good" delivered to a man who needed four hours of lead time for fifty head of pack stock; talking points that deflected the public's only question. Operating principle: diagnose which layer failed before prescribing; Starlink fixes none of the architecture problems, and a liaison fixes none of the connectivity problems. the incident failed at all three layers simultaneously, and the layers compounded.

4.4 Clarity and consistency

The pattern: inconsistency between messages, between message and record, and between practice and rotation was more corrosive than bad news ever was. "Confine and contain" versus "full suppression from the start." "Everything looks good" versus "get the livestock now." "The fire will go north" versus the runner at the door. The access exception honored by one officer and refused by the next. The single-signature WFDSS speaking for a four-agency decision. Stakeholders in this corpus consistently tolerated hard truths and punished contradictions: nobody blamed the park for the wind, but everyone remembers the reversal. Operating principle: consistency is a discipline of the record — say what the decision record says, in plain language, and when the record

changes, change the message with it and say why. The stakeholders can handle the truth changing; they cannot handle the story changing while the truth stays still.

4.5 Urgency

The pattern: urgency was systematically mismatched to the fire — administrative tempo ran slower than fire tempo before the loss, and attention tempo ran on iconic loss rather than on risk. Before: "fire doesn't wait" versus waiting until Monday because of the holiday; the closed-road request granted "by then it was too late"; the retardant answer that never changed while conditions did; the team order that sat in confusion for hours. After: the incident "jumped to top priority" only after the lodge burned — the state engaged after the loss, the board engaged after the loss, the national level engaged after a social media post. And the inverse after containment: the permittee's observation that capacity is abundant during suppression and evaporates the day the perimeter closes, leaving recovery — fences, hazard trees, springs — to a slow bleed. Operating principle: the fire sets the clock; every approval, ordering, and notification pathway must be benchmarked against fire tempo in advance, and the triggers for escalation must be risk-based, because loss-based escalation is, by definition, too late.

5. High-Impact Moves When Something Goes Wrong

Drawn from what stakeholders said helped — or said would have helped — organized by phase. These are the moves with the highest harm-reduction yield on this record.

5.1 The first hours

- Size-up before strategy. Do not let a promising-looking start shortcut the doctrine; the on-scene IC reports before the strategy conversation concludes. Cost: an hour. What it buys: a decision anchored to ground truth and an operator corps that trusts the process.
- Establish AA reachability immediately: the AA or named alternate answers, and the incoming IC receives the contact card — primary, alternate, and the fallback — before assuming command.
- Start the administrative clock at fire tempo: orders, notifications (dispatch, county, partners, region), and the decision record all begin the day of ignition. The holiday is not a variable the fire recognizes.
- Speak with calibrated honesty from the first message: state what is known, what is uncertain, and what would change the assessment. Reassurance that outruns evidence is the most expensive sentence in this record.

- Run the round-the-room. If the zone is shared, the partner is asked, on the record, before the strategy is selected. Thirty minutes of inclusion at the point of leverage would have changed this incident's entire interagency trajectory.

5.2 During escalation

- Convert intent into acknowledged record: when direction changes (national posture, strategy, triggers), it is written, acknowledged by the receiving level, and reflected in the decision record the same day. A strategy reaffirmed without criteria is momentum, not a decision.
- Co-locate decision-makers: AA presence at ICP daily, an embedded agency representative, partner AAs sharing one rhythm. Three separate IMTs identified this as the decisive variable, and the phases that had it ran coherently.
- Push triggers to the people they protect: employees, concessionaires, and cooperators hear the trigger points and the lead-times they imply. The livestock operator needed four hours; the system knew that and never priced it in.
- Feed the amplifiers: dispatch, the county, and the PIO hear consequence-level developments (structure impact, team order, strategy change) within the hour, because they are the system's broadcast layer and they cannot transmit what they were never told.
- Hold the line on assignment discipline even while improvising: anyone retasked gets a frequency, a supervisor, and an assignment. The improvisation that preserved life on this incident was done by people who then had to invent all three under fire.

5.3 Immediately after loss

- Presence over polish: the AA at the ICP, leadership in every debrief, board members back in the county, the superintendent in front of the displaced. On this record, presence was read as caring and absence was read as verdict — there was no neutral.
- One narrative, anchored to the record: the explanation of what was decided and why, delivered by someone who made the decisions, before the vacuum fills with the origin story told by someone else. The public meetings failed because operations briefers were sent to answer accountability questions.
- Stand up the stakeholder channel on day one of the loss phase: a single liaison per stakeholder class (concessions, permittees, residents), a regular product (map, video, short email), and returned phone calls. The permittee who received this names it as the thing that worked; it is nearly free.
- Account for everyone, then say so: a personnel and partner accountability picture (including the concessionaire crews, the contractors, the volunteers) closed and

communicated fast. The worst hours in several stakeholder accounts were the unaccounted-for hours.

- Protect the people who held the line: structured debrief with leadership, psychological support offered proactively, and a written answer to "how was the decision made that put me there." The unanswered question is still open in this corpus, months later, and it is the one doing the lasting damage.

5.4 Recovery

- Charter the recovery organization like an incident: a real delegation, role-qualified staff, and a safety function with authority — because reentry is a second incident with higher emotion and slower clocks, and staffing it with whoever is available reproduces every failure mode of the first incident.
- Keep one hazard-control authority over the contaminated footprint, with access discipline that survives agency pressure to get people back in. The week-long fight over who controlled the burned area was a governance failure replaying itself in the recovery phase.
- Publish the recovery picture on a cadence: status, constraints (the leach-field cap, the pipeline, the power), and decision timelines — to employees, concessionaires, and the county — so their own planning can proceed. The post-containment communication vacuum was a second injury to people already hurt.
- Defend recovery resourcing before the suppression money evaporates: hazard trees, fences, water sources, and roads committed and scheduled while attention is still high. On this record, the permittees know exactly what happens otherwise, because it happened to them on the last fire.

6. The Discretionary-Time Portfolio

Everything below was identified by stakeholders as the thing that was missing — and everything below can be built in slack time, mostly with existing knowledge and minimal money. Organized by what it buys when the unforeseen event arrives.

6.1 Buys decision speed

- Pre-enabled conditional authorizations ("break-glass" packages). Retardant, mechanized equipment, and closed-road access pre-analyzed in the fire management plan, with the release triggers and the signature authority named. Converts a multi-day toggle into hours. This single artifact addresses the most-cited operational friction in the corpus.

- Delegation and intent templates by incident type. Type 3, CIMT, all-hazard, business advisor, and recovery-team delegations pre-drafted; AA leader's-intent one-pager template. The wrong-DOA email and the day-four business delegation were template problems, not judgment problems.
- Values-at-risk lists per developed area, on the shelf. The IMT that received one in 48 hours called it an enabling condition; it could be a day-one handout.
- Decision-record discipline kit. A WFDSS pattern that names assumptions, triggers, management action points, and failure points ("how could this line fail?"), with the 24-hour norm. Makes reaffirmation an act with criteria and makes the record defensible when scrutiny arrives.

6.2 Buys shared awareness

- Site hazard intelligence packets. One page per system — chlorine, electrical isolation and backfeed, water capacity and failure behavior, asbestos survey index, fuel and propane points — staged at dispatch, embedded in the IMT in-brief template, refreshed annually by the people who already hold the knowledge.
- Connectivity map and cache. Known radio and cell blind spots mapped; Starlink units cached with an authorization protocol (the business advisor's code-word control model already exists); landline and alternate-contact inventory; LE–wildland radio zone cross-programming done in the shop.
- Notification run cards. Who is told what, within what time, for which trigger events — dispatch, county emergency management, the elected officials, the region, the partners, the concessionaires. The board chair's surprise and the dispatch center's overnight ignorance were both run-card absences.
- Default invite lists for decision forums. The strategy call, the complexity analysis, the cooperators call — standing rosters maintained like dispatch run cards, so inclusion does not depend on someone remembering to forward the invite.

6.3 Buys trust

- Preseason joint leader's intent between superintendent and forest supervisor for the shared zone, revisited whenever national posture changes — with the codified round-the-room strategy-selection protocol in the annual operating plan.
- The strategy lexicon. Plain-language, cross-agency definitions of full suppression, confine and contain, point protection, and monitor — with the public-facing explanation drafted in peacetime ("here is what it means, why we would choose it, and what would change our mind"). This is the direct preventive for the terminology reversal that destroyed public trust.

- Relationship cadence with the county and state. The 10:00 briefing model institutionalized as a pre-agreed activation, the alert-authority designation settled with county emergency management in writing, and the forward-liaison practice ("stand against the wall and listen") normalized in both directions.
- Stakeholder liaison architecture. One named channel per stakeholder class with a product cadence — the incident communication specialist model that the permittee praised, designed before it is needed, plus the livestock and property access protocol written down so the roadblock officer on day three can honor it.

6.4 Buys capability under stress

- Drills. One evacuation drill per season including concessionaires (the organization that drilled, evacuated cleanly; the organizations that had not, improvised). One structural–wildland integration exercise. One chlorine-plan walkthrough with the wildland and structural responders who would actually trigger it.
- Single-point-of-failure inventory. List every function one person carries — the electrical system, the chlorine knowledge, the water plant, the PIO — and for each: a cross-trained second, a 24/7 reachability roster with alternates, and a one-page continuity sheet. The corpus contains at least four functions that came down to one human being and luck.
- AA bench and rotation plan. Named, qualified bench; relief cadence agreed preseason (the two-week rotation the relief AA modeled); proxy authority for the deputy in writing; and the AA qualification ambiguity resolved before it is tested.
- Surge rosters. PIO surge triggered by evacuation; internal all-hazard/ICS cadre identified and trained (the safety manager had been asking for exactly this); dispatch surge and 24-hour coverage pre-arrangements; recovery-team cadre with incident experience identified before the recovery exists.
- Business and finance readiness. Procurement status tracker stood up as standing infrastructure; EERA tracking standardized; charter renewals tracked as deliverables; vendor-communication protocol for payment delays, because the vendors who front payroll are stakeholders too, and they remember.

7. What Worked — The Preserve List

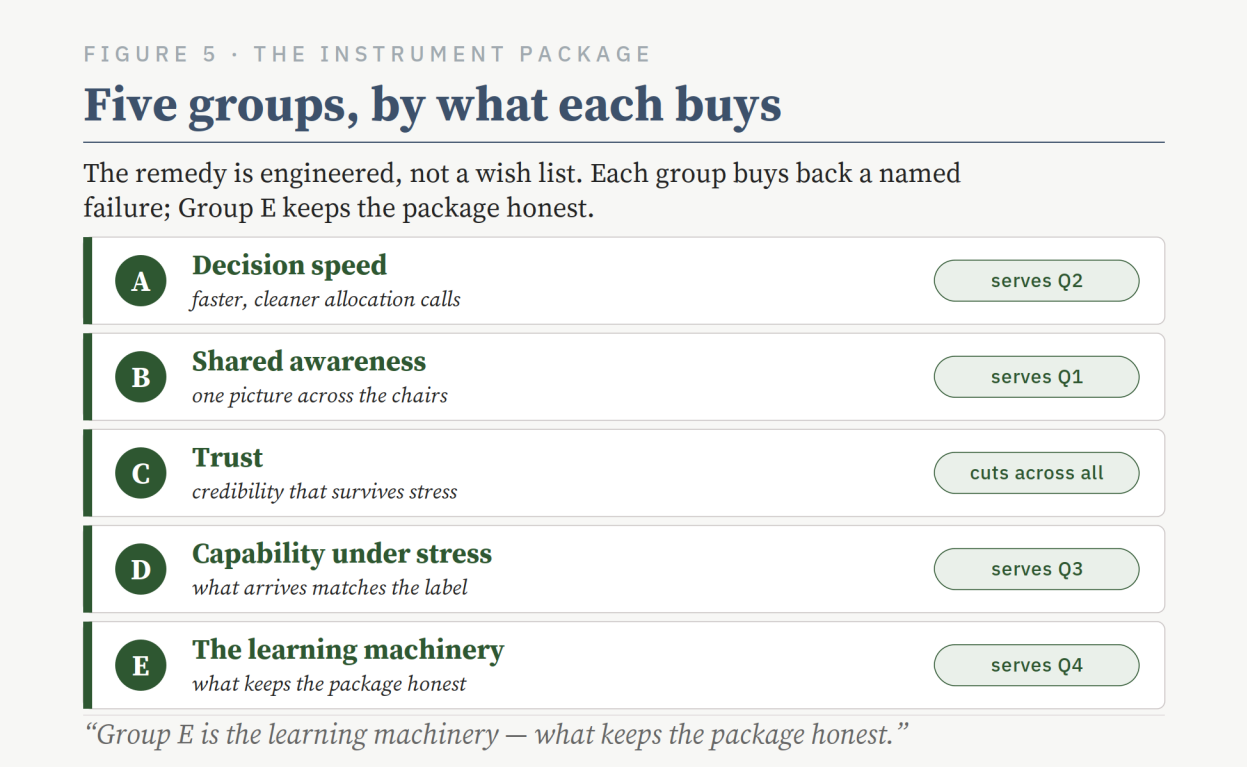
A learning product that catalogs only failure teaches the wrong lesson. The following practices, drawn from the same corpus, worked under the worst conditions and should be named, kept, and spread:

- The co-located AA model: partner AAs in one trailer, one daily rhythm, an empowered trainee — described by the AA who lived it as the reason coordination held.
- The embedded agency representative at ICP — "invaluable," in the IC's word — converting park knowledge into incident speed daily.
- Personal, face-to-face leader's intent at command transition, plus the structured two-day overlap.
- The values-at-risk list delivered within 48 hours of the request.
- The daily 10:00 cooperator and elected-official briefing — universally praised across county, state, and federal stakeholders.
- The incident communication specialists' stakeholder products: maps, briefing videos, emails, returned calls. Named by a permittee as the thing that worked.
- The county's river-corridor satellite alerting — discretionary-time infrastructure built for floods, repurposed within hours for fire and chlorine warnings below the rim.
- The concessionaire's annual evacuation drills, which produced a clean visitor and employee evacuation under real conditions.
- The risk-gating discipline at the hazard footprint once established: assessment before entry, color-coded daily access, no entry without briefing and the right to decline — maintained against sustained emotional pressure to hurry.
- The improvised escalations that worked because individuals refused to let the system fail: the electrician who pushed the chlorine warning through any channel that would carry it, the mechanic who stayed to keep the water flowing, the hotshot superintendent who made the command organization see the photograph. The goal of everything in Section 6 is to make their heroism unnecessary next time.

8. Closing

Read together, the sixty voices in this corpus are remarkably aligned on what they needed, and almost none of it was exotic: ask me before you decide on the zone we share; tell me the truth at the speed I need it; give the person you send authority that matches what you will hold them accountable for; publish the triggers; drill the plan; answer the phone; show up afterward. Bad outcomes will come again — the next lightning strike is already scheduled. The difference between a bad outcome and a broken system is the connective tissue, and every strand of it identified in this document can be built on an ordinary Tuesday, by people who already know how, before the smoke report.

PART TWO — THE INSTRUMENT PACKAGE



The approach: seventeen signed-and-staged instruments that convert Part One into readiness, each carrying its own evidence anchor, owner, and hygiene.

1. Purpose and Design Rules

1.1 This package converts Part One's stakeholder record into instruments: artifacts a named owner can sign, stage, and activate, rather than recommendations a reader can agree with. The design discipline is borrowed from the system-level body of work and applied at the incident tier, where the season's clock runs fastest. The focus is incident response and the incident management team — the unit, zone, and team level — not any single department, though most instruments transfer.

1.2 Five rules govern every instrument in the package:

- Instruments reach people; exhortations do not. Every item below is a fillable artifact, a protocol with an agenda, or a card that fits a pocket — never advice. The test applied to each: what does the stakeholder hold in their hand when this exists?

- Every instrument names an owner who can sign it. Nothing here requires new authority, legislation, or anyone conceding a structural argument. The owner column is the actor whose existing signature activates the item.
- No instrument requires anyone to become a better person. Every failure in this record these instruments address was produced by people behaving rationally inside their incentives — the FMO preserving a relationship, the manager protecting wilderness policy, the editor tightening prose. Each instrument is built so the locally rational action and the system-healthy action become the same action.
- Every instrument carries its own hygiene. Following the reform-hygiene standard: each item states its evidence anchor (the stakeholder need it answers), a success criterion, and an evaluation point — applied to this package first, because a package that indicts announced-and-unmeasured change owes the system a change it can measure.
- The window expires. The futures analysis found that instruments not completed early are, in most futures, never completed; the incident record shows the same property at unit scale — every missing artifact on the day of ignition had been buildable on any prior Tuesday, and none was built afterward under load. The package is sized to be completed before the next fire season. Items deferred past that point should be treated as declined, not delayed.

1.3 Modularity.

Each instrument stands alone and can be lifted, rebranded, or adopted piecemeal by a unit, a zone, a team, or a coordinating group. The package loses compounding value when split — several instruments feed each other — but partial adoption beats whole admiration.

1.4 Format.

Each instrument states: what it buys; the evidence anchor in the incident record; the instrument itself (the fields, shell, or protocol — ready to populate); the owner who signs it; and the hygiene line (success criterion and evaluation point).

2. Group A — Instruments That Buy Decision Speed

IR-1 — Conditional Authorization Annex ("Break-Glass" Package)

What it buys: *Hours instead of days on the tool-authorization toggle — the most-cited operational friction in the corpus.*

Evidence anchor: Closed-road access requested almost daily and granted "by then it was too late"; retardant requests answered no with the approval pathway unclear to the requesters; mechanized approval arriving 4.5 hours before the fire crossed the road it would have defended.

The instrument. An annex to the fire management plan, signed preseason, containing one row per constrained tool or access. Each row pre-completes the analysis that currently happens during the incident:

Constrained tool / access	Pre-analyzed conditions of use	Release trigger (objective)	Releasing authority + alternate	Documentation + expiry
Retardant (park/wilderness)	MIST review done; avoidance zones mapped; resource advisor concurrence pre-obtained for defined polygons	Fire established outside planned perimeter OR structures within [X] mi under aligned wind	AA; if unreachable [time standard], Acting per IR-15 card	Verbal OK logged by dispatch; written within 24 h; expires at containment
Mechanized equipment off-road	Corridors pre-identified and surveyed; rehabilitation standard attached	Spotting across [named feature] OR complexity assessment exceeds Type 3	AA / delegated per DOA	Same
Closed / proposed-wilderness road access (e.g., gated two-tracks)	Minimum-impact default stated; motorized exception pre-scoped (vehicle class, season, rehab)	Operational holding requirement on the feature OR firefighter extraction need	AA or named designee — decision standard: [X] hours from request	Same
[Unit-specific: e.g., aviation	[Pre-analysis]	[Trigger]	[Authority]	[Documentation]

Constrained tool / access	Pre-analyzed conditions of use	Release trigger (objective)	Releasing authority + alternate	Documentation + expiry
water sources, cultural-site buffers]				

Companion rule, printed on the annex: a denial is answered with the explained-denial standard (IR-8) — the reason, the deciding authority, and what observable change would change the answer. The corpus shows requests dying in relay with no one able to say who said no or what would move them.

Owner: Agency Administrator and FMO jointly (annex to the FMP); zone partner counter-signature where the zone is shared

Hygiene: Success: first incident use shows tool-toggle time under the annex standard. Evaluate: after first activation and at season end; report to the zone board of directors / unit leadership team.

IR-2 — Delegation and Leader's Intent Set

What it buys: *No incoming commander operates on the wrong instrument, a stale instrument, or no instrument.*

Evidence anchor: The Type 3 IC emailed the CIMT's delegation instead of his own during the escalation; the Type 3 organization operating on the zone delegation alone with no incident-specific instrument and no one-on-one AA in-brief; the business advisor's delegation arriving on day four; the forest's delegation executed mid-tour.

The instrument. A pre-staged set, version-controlled in one folder dispatch can transmit: (a) delegation shells by organization type — Type 3, CIMT, all-hazard, incident business advisor, recovery organization — each with the incident-specific blanks highlighted; (b) a one-page leader's intent template: purpose, end state, key values in priority order, risk guidance (what I will accept risk for, what I will not), constraints with their release triggers (cross-reference IR-1), communication expectations and cadence; (c) the AA contact card: primary, alternate, fallback, the response-time standard for each, and the explicit statement of who holds decision authority when the primary is unreachable. The card travels with every delegation. No delegation transmits without the card.

Owner: AA signs the shells preseason; dispatch holds the folder; FMO maintains version control

Hygiene: Success: every command transition this season includes the correct instrument and the card before assumption of command. Evaluate: each transition, logged by dispatch; season-end roll-up.

IR-3 — Decision-Record Discipline Kit (with Trigger Publication Layer)

What it buys: *A decision record that leads reality instead of trailing it — and triggers that reach the people they protect.*

Evidence anchor: Strategy reaffirmed in successive decisions without documented reassessment; the monsoon assumption carrying the plan with no stated failure point; a comparator superintendent's warning that the record lags the live decision; employees and the livestock operator learning the trigger had tripped from a panicked runner and a phone call hours too late.

The instrument — three sheets used together, attached to the first decision within 24 hours of ignition:

- Sheet 1, Assumptions and Validation: each load-bearing assumption (weather pattern, resource availability, line condition, partner posture) | the evidence for it today | the observable that would falsify it | who watches it | the date it is next checked. The monsoon goes on this sheet or the strategy does not rest on it.
- Sheet 2, Triggers and Management Action Points: the objective condition | the pre-decided action | the authority who acts | the maximum decision latency. Includes a failure-point row for every control feature: "how could this line fail?" answered in writing, with the contingency resource order attached.
- Sheet 3, the Trigger Translation Sheet — the publication layer: the same triggers rewritten in plain language for employees, concessionaires, and cooperators, with the lead-time each audience needs priced in ("if spotting crosses [feature], livestock operations will be notified immediately; assume four hours to load and move"). Distributed at the first all-hands and the first cooperator call. The corpus is unambiguous that the people the triggers protect never knew the triggers existed.

Owner: FMO / incident planning, countersigned by AA with each decision; Sheet 3 distribution by PIO and liaison

Hygiene: Success: every published decision carries Sheets 1–2; every audience on the notification run card (IR-6) has received Sheet 3 within 48 hours of ignition. Evaluate: first incident; after-action checks sheet currency against the actual escalation timeline.

IR-4 — Values-at-Risk Shelf List

What it buys: *The 48-hour product delivered in 48 minutes.*

Evidence anchor: The CIMT that requested and received a values-at-risk list within 48 hours named it an enabling condition of coherent operations; the isolated developed area was never fully incorporated into the planning area as a priority value while threatened.

The instrument. One list per developed area or value cluster, maintained annually: value | location | priority tier with the rationale (life safety / irreplaceability / system criticality) | protection-relevant facts (construction, water supply, defensible space status, suppression system status including any impairments — the backflow lockouts belong on this line) | hazard cross-reference to the IR-5 packet | the owner of the entry. Staged with dispatch; handed to every incoming organization as part of IR-7.

Owner: Unit interdisciplinary team (fire, facilities, structural fire, resources, concessions); AA signs the priority tiers

Hygiene: Success: incoming IC possesses the list before first operational period. Evaluate: each transition; annual refresh logged.

3. Group B — Instruments That Buy Shared Awareness

IR-5 — Site Hazard Intelligence Packets

What it buys: *The chlorine warning arrives with the incident instead of through somebody's spouse.*

Evidence anchor: The chlorine hazard pushed through an improvised family channel because the formal chain was off for the weekend; a chlorine response plan that existed but was unknown to the wildland responders who would trigger it; electrical backfeed risk known to one person; sprinkler impairments invisible to the incident; the stopgap team building its hazard picture around a borrowed Starlink with no incoming briefing.

The instrument. One page per system, refreshed annually by the person who already holds the knowledge, staged at dispatch and embedded in the IR-7 in-brief package. Standard shell: the hazard in one sentence | location map reference | the failure behavior under fire ("cylinders rupture under heat; gas flows downhill toward [drainage]") | immediate protective action and the existing plan's trigger | isolation/shutoff steps | the knowledge owner and 24/7 reachback (cross-reference IR-14) | last-verified date. Minimum set for a developed area: pressurized/hazardous chemicals; electrical isolation and backfeed; water system capacity and failure behavior; asbestos and structure-hazmat survey index; fuel, propane, and compressed-gas points.

Owner: Each system's discipline owner (utilities, facilities, safety, structural fire); safety officer compiles; FMO signs the packet into the dispatch stage

Hygiene: Success: incoming organizations receive the packet at in-brief; zero hazard classes discovered by the incident that the unit already knew. Evaluate: first incident; annual verification sweep.

IR-6 — Notification Run Cards

What it buys: *Nobody who amplifies the system's information learns the news from the news.*

Evidence anchor: Dispatch not told of structure impacts the night they occurred and learning of the CIMT order from the receiving team; the county board chair learning the developed area was burning by phone at a national conference; the region engaging off a social media post.

The instrument. A card per trigger event, maintained like a dispatch run card: the event | the recipients in order | the clock standard | the channel | the sender. Minimum trigger set, all drawn from this incident's misses: strategy selection and any strategy change (zone partner, region, county EM — same day); managed-fire selection during elevated national posture (region with rationale — 24 h); team order or IC transition (dispatch — within the hour); evacuation consideration (county EM — at consideration, not at decision, with the alert-authority designation pre-settled in writing); structure impact or fatality-risk event (dispatch, county, region, elected officials' designee — within the hour); recovery-phase transitions (concessionaires, permittees, employees — per IR-11 cadence).

Owner: FMO and dispatch center manager jointly; county alert-authority line countersigned by county emergency management

Hygiene: Success: after-action timeline shows every card executed to standard. Evaluate: each activation; card reviewed at the annual operating plan refresh.

IR-7 — Incoming Command Package

What it buys: *No commander assumes command of an information vacuum.*

Evidence anchor: The Type 3 IC who took command with no resource list, no reachable AA, the wrong delegation, and Starlink-dependent connectivity; the stopgap team with no incoming hazard briefing; order confusion costing a team hours.

The instrument. A standing checklist of what every incoming IC receives before assuming command, with dispatch as the enforcing custodian: the correct delegation and AA contact card (IR-2) | leader's intent one-pager | current decision with Sheets 1–2 (IR-3) | values-at-risk list (IR-4) | hazard packets (IR-5) | best-known resource picture with the caveat line ("confirmed / ordered / unconfirmed") | communications plan including known dead zones and the connectivity cache location | the notification run cards in force (IR-6). The

rule: if an element is missing, the gap is named out loud at transfer of command and logged — an honest hole beats a silent one.

Owner: FMO builds; dispatch transmits; the outgoing and incoming IC sign the transfer line

Hygiene: Success: 100% of transitions this season include the package or a logged gap statement. Evaluate: per transition; season-end review.

IR-8 — Crux-of-Strategy Request and Explained-Denial Standard

What it buys: *Resource requests the allocator can believe — and denials the requester can act on.*

Evidence anchor: Imported from the allocation analysis and matched to this record: the highest-value request states situation, action, purpose — "two days of moderating weather opens a window on the piece of line that decides this fire; four crews for four days takes it." On the incident, retardant and resource requests moved as bare asks through relays, and the answers came back as bare noes; neither side could see the other's reasoning, and the requests stopped.

The instrument — two cards, printed back to back. The request card, for critical asks: the situation (what the fire is doing and the window that exists) | the action (the specific resource, for the specific duration, on the specific piece of ground) | the purpose (what strategic outcome this purchases and what is lost without it) | the falsifiable line (what result will be visible if filled). The denial card: the decision and who made it | the reason in one sentence | the observable condition that would change the answer | when it will be reconsidered. Adopted as the format for critical requests and denials between IC, FMO, AA, and dispatch.

Owner: FMO and IC cadre adopt by zone standard; dispatch logs requests/denials in card format

Hygiene: Success: critical-ask sample at season end shows the grammar in use and zero unexplained denials. Evaluate: season-end sample review under a learning-not-blame charter.

4. Group C — Instruments That Buy Trust

IR-9 — Shared-Zone Strategy Selection Protocol (the Round-the-Room, Codified)

What it buys: *The partner is asked at the moment of highest leverage — on the record, every time.*

Evidence anchor: The district ranger with five decades on the zone who was concerned about the strategy and never spoke because the round-the-room never came to him; the deputy fire staff who had to request an invitation to the decisive call; "it's a park fire" functioning as a governance decision nobody ever signed.

The instrument. A one-page protocol in the annual operating plan, activated whenever a strategy other than full suppression is considered on the shared zone: (1) the standing invite list, maintained like a run card — the zone partner's line officer, fire staff, and duty officer are on it by name, and the invitation is dispatch-logged; (2) the agenda script — situation, the strategy under consideration, then the round-the-room in which each named participant is asked, individually and on the record, for their assessment and any red flags; (3) the input record — one line per participant, position stated, retained with the decision file; (4) the disagreement rule — an unresolved objection from a zone partner is recorded in the decision document itself, with the deciding official's rationale. The protocol does not move the decision right; it makes the decision's inputs visible, which is what the excluded parties actually asked for.

Owner: Superintendent and forest supervisor jointly, in the annual operating plan; duty officers execute

Hygiene: Success: every non-suppression strategy selection this season has a complete input record. Evaluate: per selection; AOP annual review.

IR-10 — Strategy Lexicon and Public Translation Sheet

What it buys: *The terminology reversal — the single most trust-destroying event in the record — becomes structurally impossible.*

Evidence anchor: Early public messaging said confine and contain; later talking points said full suppression from the start. The PIO, the forest supervisor, and the recovery operations lead independently identify that contradiction as the moment public trust failed and never recovered.

The instrument. A preseason sheet, agreed across the agencies that share a public: each strategy term (full suppression, confine and contain, point protection, monitor) with (a) the operational definition, (b) the plain-language public line ("confine and contain means we build a perimeter and burn to it — here is why we would choose it"), and (c) the what-would-change-our-mind line, pre-written. Companion rule, the decision-narrative discipline: the public message is the current decision record in plain language; when the record changes, the message changes the same day, with the reason stated. The sheet is the PIO's authority to be consistent against pressure to reframe — the corpus shows the PIO knew the reversal was wrong and had no instrument to resist it with.

Owner: Superintendent and forest supervisor sign the lexicon; PIOs of both agencies hold it; AA owns the decision-narrative rule

Hygiene: Success: zero divergence between published strategy language and the decision record across the season. Evaluate: after-action message-versus-record audit.

IR-11 — Stakeholder Liaison Card and Access Protocol

What it buys: *One channel per stakeholder class — and the roadblock officer on day three honors the same exception as the one on day one.*

Evidence anchor: The concessions liaison's "worst communication architecture in twenty years" — five teams, duplicative requests — repaired mid-incident by a channel she built herself; the permittee turned away by an officer unfamiliar with the local exception; the livestock operator denied entry at 2200 with his employees unaccounted for; the permittee who praised the communication specialists' maps, videos, and returned calls as the thing that worked.

The instrument. Two artifacts. The liaison card, activated at incident establishment: one named channel per stakeholder class (concessionaires, permittees, residents/employees, gateway businesses, county) | the product and its cadence (map + short video + email, daily during escalation, weekly in recovery — the model the permittee praised, made standard) | the rule that information requests to stakeholders route through the channel, ending duplicative collection. The access protocol, staged preseason: the livestock and property recovery exception in writing — who qualifies, the escort standard, the time-window rule, the verification step — laminated at every control point, so the exception survives personnel rotation.

Owner: Concessions/commercial services and PIO build the card; chief ranger signs the access protocol; liaison section executes under the IMT

Hygiene: Success: stakeholder after-action sampling reports a single known channel; zero access-exception failures attributable to rotation. Evaluate: post-incident stakeholder pulse, three classes minimum.

5. Group D — Instruments That Buy Capability Under Stress

IR-12 — Retasking Minimum Standard (Pocket Card)

What it buys: *Nobody fights fire without a frequency, a supervisor, and an assignment — including the people improvised into the fight.*

Evidence anchor: The fire marshal retasked to "Structure Protection Division" by a manager outside the incident organization — no frequency, no supervisor, no assignment, briefed off a map with the fire pointed at in the wrong place; LE radios that could not talk to wildland operations; personnel deployed for evacuation support who ended up in interface defense without PPE.

The instrument. A wallet card, issued with every collateral-duty and cross-functional credential: Before you accept a fire-role retasking, you hold — (1) the incident frequency, confirmed by radio check; (2) a named supervisor inside the incident organization; (3) a written or read-back assignment with its boundaries; (4) the PPE the assignment requires. Missing any one: you support from outside the line and say so. The card's reverse: the supervisor's mirror obligations. The card converts refusal from insubordination into compliance — which is precisely the protection the improvised responders in this record did not have.

Owner: Chief ranger and structural fire chief jointly; issued at annual refresher; honored in the zone standard

Hygiene: Success: zero undocumented retaskings in the next incident's after-action. Evaluate: per incident.

IR-13 — Single-Point-of-Failure Register and Continuity Sheets

What it buys: *No critical system depends on one human being and luck.*

Evidence anchor: The only person who could operate the electrical system staying alone in a burning developed area; the chlorine knowledge resident in one evacuated operator's head; the solo PIO carrying a national-attention incident for nine days; the high-voltage electrician's departure leaving the capability gap nobody inventoried.

The instrument. A register, reviewed annually by the leadership team: each function one person carries | the person | the consequence of their absence in the worst week | the cross-trained second (named, with a training date, or the line reads NONE in bold) | the 24/7 reachback standard with alternates | the continuity sheet — one page that lets a competent stranger operate or safely shut down the system (the IR-5 packet is its hazard face). The register's honesty rule: NONE is an acceptable entry only with a leadership-signed risk acceptance and a closure date.

Owner: Unit leadership team; division chiefs populate; superintendent signs the risk acceptances

Hygiene: Success: NONE entries reduced season over season; every critical function reachable in the next incident. Evaluate: annual register review; per-incident reachability check.

IR-14 — AA Formation Bridge, Bench, and Reachability Plan

What it buys: *The administrator function survives fatigue, absence, and the first fire.*

Evidence anchor: Adapted from the allocation analysis's administrator formation bridge and matched to this record: an AA on his first fire, dual-hatted for weeks, relief improvised around pre-scheduled leave; the qualification described as "loose" by those

holding it; the IC who could not reach the AA or any alternate during the escalation window; the relief AA whose two-week, ICP-present model worked.

The instrument — four parts, completed before peak season. (1) The formation package for any new-authority AA: the delegation instruments, the decision tools (WFDSS, the IR-3 kit), the strategy seam with the zone partner, the trust mechanics — plus structured pairing with an experienced administrator for the first season. (2) The bench: named, qualified relief AAs with the rotation cadence agreed in writing (the two-week standard the record validated), and the proxy authority of the deputy stated explicitly. (3) The reachability protocol: the IR-2 contact card's response-time standards, tested quarterly by an actual drill call. (4) The presence norm: during escalation, the AA or designee is physically at ICP daily — the single factor three separate IMTs identified as decisive.

Owner: Superintendent (bench, proxy, presence norm); regional office (formation package and pairing); FMO administers the drill

Hygiene: Success: next incident shows zero unreachable-AA windows and a relief rotation executed on cadence. Evaluate: quarterly drill log; per-incident after-action.

IR-15 — Drill Set (Three Per Year, Ninety Minutes Each)

What it buys: *The plans stop being documents and start being behaviors.*

Evidence anchor: Evacuation plans never drilled — while the concessionaire who drilled annually evacuated cleanly under real conditions; the chlorine plan unknown to the responders who would trigger it; structural and wildland organizations meeting each other for the first time mid-crisis.

The instrument. Three standing drills on the preseason calendar, each ninety minutes, each with a named owner and a one-page after-action: (1) the evacuation drill, including concessionaires, exercising the trigger translation sheet (IR-3 Sheet 3) and the accountability system under a no-cell-coverage assumption; (2) the hazard-plan walkthrough — the chlorine/utility plan executed as a tabletop with the wildland, structural, and county hazmat people who would actually run it, against the IR-5 packets; (3) the integration exercise — structural fire inside a wildland incident organization, exercising the IR-12 card and the radio cross-programming, which is completed in the shop before the drill, not discovered on the hill.

Owner: Safety manager owns the calendar; each drill has a discipline owner; AA attends at least one — presence is part of the instrument

Hygiene: Success: three drills executed with after-actions filed; deficiencies converted to register entries (IR-13) or packet updates (IR-5). Evaluate: season-end calendar audit.

IR-16 — Debrief and Presence Standard

What it buys: *The people who held the line get leadership in the room and the decision narrative in writing.*

Evidence anchor: Twelve employees, most without fire training, sheltering overnight at a station — debriefed with no leadership present, and the question of how the decision was made that left them there still unanswered months later; staff texting "we think we might die"; the lasting damage in the corpus tracking the unanswered question, not the fire.

The instrument. A standing order, three lines: (1) every group that experienced a life-threat event receives a structured debrief within 72 hours, with a member of unit leadership physically present — presence is the message; (2) every such event receives a written decision narrative within 30 days: what was decided, by whom, on what information, delivered to the people affected — not as adjudication but as the answer they are owed; (3) psychological support is offered proactively at the debrief, on contracts staged preseason, not located during the crisis.

Owner: Superintendent signs the standing order; safety manager schedules; the decision narrative is drafted by the deciding official's office

Hygiene: Success: 100% of life-threat events meet all three lines. Evaluate: per event; the safety manager keeps the ledger.

6. Group E — The Learning Machinery (What Keeps the Package Honest)

The allocation analysis's keystone finding transfers intact to the incident tier: every other failure is repairable by instruments that a broken learning loop prevents the system from honestly adopting. These three instruments are the package's own feedback mechanism — and they are the cheapest items in it.

IR-17 — Quarterly Signpost Watch (One Hour)

What it buys: *Drift is caught by its signature — the dog that does not bark.*

Evidence anchor: Every missing artifact on the day of ignition had been buildable on any prior Tuesday; the futures analysis's finding that drift's early signature is unremarkable delay — instruments studied rather than issued, schedules slipping defensibly.

The instrument. One hour per quarter on the leadership team calendar, agenda fixed: review first what has NOT happened on schedule. The watch list is this package's own implementation schedule plus the unit's standing signposts, drawn from this record: the annex unsigned (IR-1), the charter expired (the dispatch charter ran expired for over a

year and nobody's meeting caught it), the drill calendar slipping (IR-15), the register's NONE entries aging (IR-13), the contact-card drill missed (IR-14), the AOP refresh deferred. Each miss gets an owner and a date in the minutes — or a leadership-signed decision to drop the item, which is honest in a way that silent slippage is not.

Owner: Unit leadership team; the FMO keeps the watch list; minutes are the record

Hygiene: Success: four watches held; zero items more than one quarter late without a signed decision. Evaluate: the minutes are self-evaluating.

IR-18 — Annual Assumption Audit

What it buys: *The load-bearing assumptions are named before the season tests them.*

Evidence anchor: The monsoon assumption carried the incident strategy and was never written down as an assumption; the system assumed the AA was reachable, the partner was content, the plans were drilled, and the record matched the message — and discovered otherwise under load.

The instrument. One preseason session. The unit lists the assumptions its fire management posture is observably making, tests each for erosion, and assigns each an owner and a hedge. The starter set, every line drawn from this record: "The monsoon arrives on climatology." "The AA (or a qualified alternate) is reachable within the standard." "The zone partner concurs with our default posture." "Our evacuation plans work" (test: when were they last drilled?). "Our hazard knowledge reaches the incident" (test: do the IR-5 packets exist and are they current?). "Our public messaging matches our decision record." "The people who carry critical systems will be here in July." Close the session with a one-hour premortem run inside the worst plausible season — the futures discipline at unit scale: it is two years from now and the next major fire went badly on our zone; what failed, and which instrument in this package would have caught it?

Owner: AA convenes; FMO and safety manager staff it; each assumption gets a named owner

Hygiene: Success: the audit sheet exists, every assumption has an owner, and at least one hedge per cycle is funded or built. Evaluate: next year's audit opens by scoring this year's.

IR-19 — Reform Hygiene Standard — Applied to This Package First

What it buys: *Announced change becomes measured change.*

Evidence anchor: The allocation analysis's standard: every change memo states the problem's evidence, the constraints, the success criteria, the evaluation date, and the report-back commitment. The the incident record's counterexample: corrective actions and program reviews whose findings were never tracked to closure — the report's own Theme 7 material.

The instrument. The five-field header adopted for every change memo, SOP revision, and plan update the unit issues — and applied to this package first: each IR item above carries its evidence anchor, owner, success criterion, and evaluation point, and the package as a whole is reviewed at two points — end of the build season (were the instruments issued?) and end of the first fire season (did they perform?), with the results reported to the same leadership forum that signed them, in writing, whichever way they came out. A package that cannot be falsified is an exhortation with formatting.

Owner: Unit leadership team adopts the header; the FMO owns the two reviews

Hygiene: This instrument is the hygiene. Its success criterion is the existence and publication of the two reviews.

7. Provenance — Where Each Instrument Came From

Every instrument traces to two sources: a documented need in the incident stakeholder corpus, and where noted, a mechanism imported from the system-level body of work and scaled to the incident tier. The imports and the reasoning:

- IR-8 (crux-of-strategy / explained denial) imports the allocation analysis's request-grammar finding. The the incident record shows the same request spiral at incident scale — bare asks, bare noes, requests dying in relay — and the same repair applies: make the honest request the easy format and make every denial actionable.
- IR-14 (formation bridge) imports SP-7. This record is the case study that instrument was waiting for: a first-fire AA, no formation package, no pairing, no bench.
- IR-17 and IR-18 (signpost watch, assumption audit) import the futures disciplines at unit scale. The futures analysis's deepest finding — the default future requires no decisions, only deferrals, and its early signature is unremarkable delay — is also the exact mechanism by which the ignition-day readiness gaps formed. The same one-hour disciplines that catch drift at system scale catch it at unit scale.
- IR-19 (reform hygiene) imports SP-8 whole, because a readiness package issued without its own evaluation machinery would reproduce the announced-and-unmeasured pattern both bodies of work indict.
- The design rules themselves — instruments not exhortations, the owner who can sign, no villains, the expiring window — are the system-level analysis's architecture applied to the only tier that runs on the season's clock. The futures found that what each world harvested from its disasters was determined entirely by what it had built before they arrived. At unit scale, that sentence is this package's entire argument.

8. Closing

Seventeen instruments. None requires new authority. None requires anyone to concede an argument or become a better person. Each was paid for once already, at full price, one fire season ago. The futures analysis closes on the claim that the futures that work are not the ones where people improve but the ones where the instruments arrive — and the quarters in which they can arrive cheaply are the ones now passing. At the incident tier the same claim compresses to a season: the next lightning strike is already scheduled, and everything on this list can be signed before it lands.

Movement III — The Fire Chief as Agency Administrator

An action catalog for the new regional or unit fire chief assuming administrator responsibilities — initial attack through aerial firing, dispatch through delegation

1. Purpose, Premise, and How to Use This Catalog

1.1 The premise. The reorganization placed fire officers in chairs that carry agency administrator authority — strategy approval, risk acceptance, delegation, and the signature on the decision record — while land-management judgment, statutory accountability, and most of the relationships the function runs on remain distributed across other offices. A new regional or unit fire chief holding this authority inherits the hardest seat in the system on its first day: every condition documented in the incident-tier record (the unreachable administrator, the strategy selected before size-up, the partner never asked, the authorization that arrived too late, the intent that never reached the line) is now this officer's to prevent, and the formation pipeline that should prepare them for it does not yet exist. This catalog is the bridge: the concrete actions, organized by functional domain, that convert the authority on paper into effectiveness across every aspect of incident response.

1.2 The design rules carry over from the companion volumes. Every action below produces an artifact, a relationship, or a rehearsed behavior — never a sentiment. Where an action instantiates an instrument from the Incident Readiness Instrument Package, the IR number is cited; the crosswalk at Section 12 maps the whole catalog. No action requires new authority. And the window logic applies with full force: nearly everything here is a preseason build, and the record is unambiguous that what is not built before ignition is improvised after it, at a price someone else pays.

1.3 Three horizons. Each action is tagged: *(Build)* — done once, before the season, producing a signed artifact; *(Rhythm)* — a standing cadence that keeps the build current; *(Execute)* — the behavior on the incident itself. A useful self-test for the new chief: if your calendar shows only Execute actions, the season is managing you.

2. The Foundation — Your Own Formation (First 90 Days)

The stake: the record's most consequential single condition was an administrator new to the function, on a first fire, with no formation package, no pairing, and no bench. Do not let that be the next review's first finding about you.

2.1 *(Build)* Assemble your authority inventory. One page: every authority you actually hold, in writing — strategy approval thresholds, risk acceptance, delegation power, firing and retardant and mechanized approvals, spending limits — and beside each, what requires the land official, the region, or the national level. Test it against five scenarios with your staff until the page survives contact. Most new administrators discover the seam between fire authority and land authority only when an incident lands on it; find yours in February.

2.2 *(Build)* Negotiate the seam doctrine with your land officials. For every unit you serve: who decides what, where fire objectives and land objectives interact — strategy selection on values-critical ground, retardant near sensitive resources, mechanized equipment in special designations, firing into areas with resource constraints. Write it as a two-signature page. The record shows the seam undefended is where strategies get selected without the round-the-room and where authorizations die in relay.

2.3 *(Build)* Arrange your pairing. A named, experienced administrator — your mentor for the first season — with a standing agreement: you call them before every consequential decision your first year, and they shadow your first major incident. This is the formation bridge (SP-7 in the allocation analysis) applied to yourself. Asking for it is not weakness; the record's strongest-performing relief administrator arrived having monitored three days of meetings before taking the chair.

2.4 *(Build)* Write and publish your own leader's intent. One page, to your whole organization and your partners: your default posture (aggressive initial attack unless the documented protocol says otherwise), what you will accept risk for and what you will not, your reachability standard, and your expectations of ICs, duty officers, and dispatch. The record's incidents went best where intent was personal, explicit, and delivered face-to-face — start before the season does.

2.5 *(Build)* Make the face-to-face circuit. In person, before fire season: the dispatch center manager, every neighboring chief and duty officer, the land officials whose ground you defend, the state duty officer, county emergency management, tribal partners, cooperator fire chiefs, and your GACC coordinator. The record converts pre-positioned relationships directly into operational speed; every relationship you do not

build now will be improvised at 0200 by someone with less standing than you have today.

2.6 *(Rhythm)* Stand up your bench from day one. Name your acting officials and alternates, put the rotation cadence in writing (the two-week relief standard the record validated), state your deputy's proxy authority explicitly, and test reachability quarterly with an actual drill call (IR-14). You are not ready for the season until your absence is survivable.

3. Initial Attack

The stake: IA is where your authority meets the clock at its steepest. The record's defining failures — strategy chosen before size-up, administrative tempo at office speed while the fire ran at fire speed — are IA-phase failures, and they were all preventable by artifacts signed in advance.

3.1 *(Build)* Sign the preplanned dispatch run cards. Response levels by zone and fuels/weather condition, reviewed and countersigned with every partner whose resources appear on them. Closest-forces doctrine in writing: the nearest capable resource responds regardless of agency, with the boundary-drop and auto-aid agreements that make it lawful executed preseason.

3.2 *(Build)* Write the strategy-selection default and its exception protocol. Your standing order: full-perimeter suppression is the default on every new start; any other strategy requires on-scene size-up reported first, the shared-zone round-the-room executed (IR-9), the decision documented with assumptions and triggers (IR-3), and your signature. This single page prevents the record's originating failure — a strategy committed by radio relay before anyone with eyes on the fire had reported.

3.3 *(Build)* Issue the standing IA delegation. Duty officers and IA ICs hold written authority for IA-level decisions — ordering to defined levels, tactical aviation use, mutual aid acceptance — with the named limits and the explicit triggers that elevate the decision to you. Decision latency standards included: a request to you is answered within a stated time or your alternate answers it. Fire does not wait for the holiday weekend to end; neither does your organization.

3.4 *(Build)* Premortem the season's ten worst starts. With your duty officers and partners: the ten ignition locations and condition combinations that most threaten your unit. For each — the run card response, the access constraints, the values at risk (IR-4), the hazard packets (IR-5), the conditional authorizations that should be pre-staged (IR-1). The record shows the worst fire of the decade starting in exactly the location a premortem would have flagged in an hour.

3.5 *(Rhythm)* Benchmark IA tempo and review the misses. Time standards from report to launch to first water/line, tracked and reviewed monthly in season. Not as blame — as the signal layer. A slipping IA tempo is the unit-level dog that does not bark.

3.6 *(Execute)* Protect the size-up. On every start, your first question to the duty officer is the on-scene report, not the strategy. The discipline costs minutes and anchors everything downstream.

4. Interagency Coordination

The stake: the record's deepest wound was governance — a shared zone operated as one organization and governed as two at the only moment it mattered, a partner with five decades on the ground never asked. Your authority is new; the partners' memory is long. Coordination is where your credibility account opens.

4.1 *(Build)* Refresh every annual operating plan with decision-rights language. Beyond resource lists: who is in the strategy room for the shared zones, by name and position; the codified round-the-room protocol (IR-9) with its documented-input requirement; the disagreement rule — an unresolved partner objection is recorded in the decision document with your rationale. Countersigned by you and the partner line officers.

4.2 *(Build)* Execute joint preseason leader's intent with land officials and partner chiefs. One page per shared landscape: default posture, values priorities, the conditions under which anything other than suppression would even be considered, and the commitment to revisit when national posture changes. The record shows national direction attenuating through long chains; a standing joint-intent page is the local anchor that survives the attenuation.

4.3 *(Build)* Audit every charter and agreement for currency. Zone boards, coordinating groups, dispatch charters, mutual aid, cost-share templates. The record found an interagency dispatch center running on a charter expired for over a year — discovered only when the incident stressed it. Expired paper is improvised governance waiting to happen; track renewals as deliverables on your signpost watch (IR-17).

4.4 *(Build)* Pre-stage the cooperator briefing architecture. The daily cooperator and elected-official briefing — universally praised in the record — as a pre-agreed activation with its invite list, time, and product template ready. Settle the county alert-authority designation in writing with emergency management now, and set the elected-official notification thresholds (IR-6) so no board chair learns of the fire from the news.

4.5 *(Rhythm)* Sit on the boards personally your first season. Zone board, dispatch board, coordinating group. Send no proxy until the partners know your face and your intent. The chair you now hold was, in the record, most damaged by absence.

4.6 *(Execute)* Run the round-the-room every time, especially when you think you do not need it. The record's most experienced excluded voice had concerns that proved prophetic and was never asked. Thirty minutes of inclusion at the point of leverage is the cheapest insurance your new authority can buy.

5. Dispatching

The stake: dispatch documents what it receives and transmits what it knows — it is your organization's sensory and broadcast layer. In the record, the center was not told of structure impacts the night they occurred and learned of a team order from the receiving team. Whatever your dispatchers do not know, your system does not know.

5.1 *(Build)* Spend a full day in your center before the season. Learn what the dispatchers can actually see, what systems they run, where the workload breaks, and what they wish the field understood. Issue the center your expectations letter and your delegation to the center manager — including the explicit authority to challenge an ordering irregularity up to you without intermediaries.

5.2 *(Build)* Sign the notification run cards with the center. The IR-6 set: strategy selection or change, managed-fire selection under elevated posture, team order or IC transition, evacuation consideration, structure impact or fatality-risk event, recovery transitions — each with recipients, clock standards, channel, and sender. Dispatch is on the consequence loop for every one of them, within the hour.

5.3 *(Build)* Resolve the connectivity map in the shop. Known radio and cell dead zones mapped and published; satellite units cached with an authorization protocol; LE and cooperator radio cross-programming completed and tested; the after-hours and weekend coverage plan written so the system's knowledge never routes through whoever happens to answer a personal phone.

5.4 *(Rhythm)* Review ordering-channel discipline quarterly. Who may place which orders through which channel, verified against the last quarter's actual traffic. The record lost hours of its most consequential window to an order that was placed, canceled, and still valid depending on whom you asked.

5.5 *(Execute)* Feed the center first. On any consequence event, your organization's first call after life safety is dispatch — because every downstream notification, resource decision, and documentation thread runs through what the center knows and when it knew it.

6. Expanded Dispatch

The stake: expanded dispatch is the surge organ that keeps the IA system alive while a big incident feeds. Stood up late, it is a bottleneck wearing a vest; pre-staged, it is the difference between a center that scales and a center that drowns.

6.1 *(Build)* Write the expansion triggers. Objective criteria — concurrent incident count, order volume, complexity level, center workload indicators — at which expanded dispatch stands up, signed by you and the center manager so the decision is recognition, not negotiation, on the day it is needed.

6.2 *(Build)* Pre-identify the people, the room, and the kit. A roster of qualified expanded-dispatch personnel (with currency tracked and gaps trained before June), the physical space with its connectivity tested, the equipment cache staged, and the supervisory structure pre-assigned. Include the incident business interface: the buying team and business advisor delegations templated (IR-2) so the financial machinery arrives with the surge, not days behind it.

6.3 *(Build)* Set the ordering discipline before the surge tests it. Single-point ordering in writing; the documentation standard; the interface with the GACC stated; and the crux-of-strategy request format (IR-8) adopted for critical asks so your unit's requests arrive believable when the geographic area is rationing.

6.4 *(Rhythm)* Exercise the expansion once preseason. Ninety minutes: stand it up on a scenario, run twenty orders through it, find the friction, fix it in daylight. The record's improvised business and ordering arrangements were effective only by force of individual personality — which is not a system.

7. Aviation — Fixed-Wing, Rotor-Wing, and Retardant

The stake: aviation is where your risk-acceptance authority is most literal — every flight hour is your signature flying — and where pre-staged analysis pays fastest. In the record, retardant requests moved as bare asks through relays and died as bare noes, with the approval pathway invisible to the requesters, while the avoidance analysis that could have pre-answered the question had never been done.

7.1 *(Build)* Sign the preseason aviation plan as an operational document, not a binder. Water source inventory mapped with landowner agreements executed; dip sites and helispots pre-surveyed; helibase options identified with their constraints; airspace deconfliction baseline; known hazards (wires, towers, military routes) on one map your pilots and ATGS actually use.

7.2 *(Build)* Pre-analyze retardant with the land officials — the break-glass annex (IR-1). Avoidance zones mapped, resource advisor concurrence pre-obtained for defined polygons, the release triggers stated objectively, and the authority line named with its alternate and decision-latency standard. When the request comes at 1600 on the worst day, the answer should be a lookup, not a deliberation — and any denial travels with the explained-denial card (IR-8): the reason, the authority, and what observable change would change the answer.

7.3 *(Build)* Make the helicopter capability decision deliberately. Exclusive-use versus call-when-needed weighed against your expected load, response-time math, and module staffing — decided preseason on paper, not inherited from last year's budget shape. Carded helicopter managers and crew currency tracked on your single-point-of-failure register (IR-13); if one person's qualification is the difference between flying and not flying, that is a register line with a closure date.

7.4 *(Build)* Write the aerial supervision doctrine. The conditions requiring ATGS or leadplane overhead; the ordering triggers so supervision arrives with the airshow rather than after it; UAS rules in both directions — your own program's integration and the intrusion-response protocol with its TFR discipline.

7.5 *(Rhythm)* Run the daily aviation risk review on every incident. Cumulative exposure, crew duty, mission value: the standing question is not "can we fly this mission" but "is this mission worth the exposure today, given what it buys." You own that answer now. Decline missions out loud and on the record; your pilots will hear the precedent either way.

7.6 *(Execute)* Price aviation into strategy, not onto it. When the decision record (IR-3) names a strategy, it names the aviation assumption load-bearing to it — tanker availability, helicopter cycle times, the wind threshold that grounds the program — and the trigger that fires when the assumption fails. The record's plan-carrying weather assumption had no stated failure point; do not let your air program be the next unstated one.

8. Mechanized Equipment

The stake: heavy equipment is the capability most often strangled by an authorization seam — needed in hours, approved in days. The record's mechanized approval arrived four and a half hours before the fire crossed the road the equipment would have defended.

8.1 *(Build)* Pre-analyze the corridors. With land officials: where equipment can work, under what conditions, with what rehabilitation standard attached — mapped, signed, and staged in the conditional authorization annex (IR-1) with objective release triggers

and the named authority line. Sensitive-resource polygons drawn now, by daylight, with the resource advisors who would otherwise be located mid-incident.

8.2 *(Build)* Inspect the iron before you need it. Agreements and contracts for dozers, masticators, tenders, and transports verified preseason — equipment actually exists, operators actually carded, transport actually arranged. Equipment bosses and DOZB qualifications on the roster, currency tracked, gaps on the training calendar.

8.3 *(Execute)* Hold the rehabilitation promise. The pre-analysis that bought you speed was a two-way signature: when the incident ends, the rehabilitation standard executes on schedule and you report it back to the land official who signed. That report-back is what makes next year's annex renewable.

9. Ground and Aerial Firing

The stake: firing operations concentrate everything your new authority carries — tactical risk, land-objective interaction, public trust — into single decisions executed in hours. Intentional fire on the landscape is also where public legitimacy is most flammable: the record's deepest external trust failure was a strategy-language contradiction about what was deliberately burned and why.

9.1 *(Build)* Write the firing doctrine. One page: who may authorize tactical firing at what scale — the handline burnout an IC owns, the division-scale firing operation that requires your call, the large-scale burnout indistinguishable in consequence from a prescribed fire that requires your signature on a documented decision. Qualification standards stated (FIRB on the line; the crossover policy for prescribed-fire-qualified personnel in suppression roles), so the question of who may light never gets answered by improvisation.

9.2 *(Build)* Decide the aerial ignition capability preseason. PSD and helitorch: whether you hold the capability, whose modules and carding you draw on, the approval chain from request to spheres-in-the-machine, and the interaction with land objectives — what may be deliberately blackened where, pre-negotiated with the land officials as part of the seam doctrine (2.2).

9.3 *(Build)* Mandate the failure-point row on every firing plan. Every firing operation answers in writing: how could this fail, what is the trigger that says it is failing, what contingency force is standing when it fires, and who pulls it. The decision-record kit (IR-3) applies to firing at full strength because firing is the strategy made irreversible.

9.4 *(Build)* Pre-write the public translation for visible fire. The strategy lexicon (IR-10) extended to firing: the plain-language line for "you will see us putting fire on the ground tonight, here is why, here is what would make us stop" — drafted preseason, agreed with partner PIOs, pushed through the trigger translation sheet to communities

before glow appears on the ridge. The "they lit it" narrative fills every vacuum you leave; the record proves the cost of leaving one.

9.5 *(Execute)* Document firing decisions same-day. Rationale, conditions, authorization, and the round-the-room if the ground was shared — in the record before the operational period ends. Firing decisions are the ones reviews reconstruct hardest; write the record you will want read.

9.6 *(Execute)* Coordinate smoke like a decision, not a byproduct. Regulator notification per the preseason agreement, community notification through the standing channels, and smoke-sensitive receptors (highways, health facilities, events) checked against tonight's trajectory before ignition, not after the calls start.

10. Incident Leadership, Intent, and the Decision Record

The stake: this is the administrator function proper, and the record is a complete natural experiment in it — the same fire ran as chaos and as coherence in different phases, and the difference was entirely whether intent, presence, delegation, and the decision record were real. The model that worked is fully specified; your job is to make it your default.

10.1 *(Build)* Stage the delegation and intent set (IR-2). Delegation shells by organization type, version-controlled where dispatch can transmit them; the leader's-intent one-pager template; your contact card with response-time standards and the explicit statement of who decides when you are unreachable. No delegation transmits without the card; no commander assumes command without the incoming package (IR-7).

10.2 *(Execute)* Deliver intent personally. Face-to-face with every incoming IC: purpose, end state, values priorities, your risk guidance — what you will accept risk for and what you will not — and the constraints with their release triggers. The record's best-run phases all began with the administrator in the room; its worst began with intent relayed, attenuated, or assumed.

10.3 *(Execute)* Keep the presence norm. During escalation you or your designee are physically at the ICP daily — the single factor three separate teams in the record identified as decisive. Presence is also your sensor: the decision-support filter you depend on is calibrated by what you see for yourself.

10.4 *(Execute)* Hold the decision record to the discipline (IR-3). Assumptions named with their falsifiers, triggers and management action points with their authorities and latencies, the failure-point row answered, published within 24 hours and revalidated at every reaffirmation — so that continuing a strategy is a decision with criteria rather

than momentum, and so the record leads reality instead of trailing it. A comparator administrator's warning from the record: the document that lags the live decision destroys your defensibility precisely when scrutiny arrives.

10.5 *(Execute)* Run transitions as operations. Structured transition with overlap (the two-day standard), the outgoing and incoming signatures on the package, and the gap statement out loud for anything missing. Command transitions were where the record's system dropped what it knew.

10.6 *(Execute)* Answer requests and denials in the standard grammar (IR-8). Critical asks arrive as situation–action–purpose; your denials leave as reason–authority–what-would-change-it. Both directions are leadership: the first makes your unit believable to the allocation system, the second keeps your subordinates asking instead of quietly giving up — the record shows exactly what it costs when they stop.

10.7 *(Execute)* Own the aftermath in person. The debrief and presence standard (IR-16): leadership physically present within 72 hours for any group that experienced a life-threat event, the written decision narrative inside 30 days, support offered proactively. The record's longest-lasting damage was not done by the fire; it was done by an absence and an unanswered question.

11. The Learning Machinery — What Keeps All of It Honest

11.1 *(Rhythm)* Run the quarterly signpost watch (IR-17). One hour, leadership calendar, reviewing first what has not happened on schedule: the unsigned annex, the expired charter, the slipped drill, the aging register line, the missed reachability drill. Drift's signature is unremarkable delay; this hour is where you catch it.

11.2 *(Rhythm)* Hold the annual assumption audit with the premortem (IR-18). The load-bearing assumptions your posture is observably making — the seasonal weather pattern, your own reachability, partner concurrence, drilled plans, hazard knowledge reaching the incident, message matching record — each tested for erosion and assigned an owner, closed with the one-hour premortem: the next major fire went badly on our ground; what failed, and which artifact in this catalog would have caught it?

11.3 *(Rhythm)* Apply reform hygiene to your own paper (IR-19). Every change memo you issue carries the five fields — evidence, constraints, success criteria, evaluation date, report-back — applied first to this catalog: review at end of build season (was it signed?) and end of first fire season (did it perform?), published either way.

11.4 *(Rhythm)* After-action with the same standard you accept on the line. Every significant incident gets the review; findings convert to register entries, annex updates, or training calendar lines with owners and dates — never to a filed document. The record's host unit had findings from prior reviews that were never tracked to closure, and it paid for each of them a second time.

12. Crosswalk — This Catalog, the Instrument Package, and the Companion Volumes

The catalog is the chief's-eye view of machinery specified elsewhere in the body of work. The mapping:

Catalog domain	Instruments instantiated	Companion-volume anchor
2. Foundation	IR-2, IR-14	Allocation SP-7 (formation bridge); seam doctrine NR-1
3. Initial attack	IR-1, IR-3, IR-4, IR-5, IR-9	Stakeholder record §3.2 (FMO/duty officer lens)
4. Interagency coordination	IR-6, IR-9, IR-10, IR-17	Stakeholder record §3.4 (partner lens), §4.2 (governance)
5. Dispatching	IR-6, IR-8	Stakeholder record §3.6 (dispatch lens)
6. Expanded dispatch	IR-2, IR-8	Allocation SP-1/SP-3 (criteria, request grammar)
7. Aviation	IR-1, IR-3, IR-8, IR-13	Stakeholder record §4.5 (urgency/tempo)
8. Mechanized	IR-1, IR-13	Stakeholder record §3.2
9. Firing	IR-3, IR-9, IR-10	Stakeholder record §4.1, §4.4 (trust; clarity and consistency)
10. Leadership and intent	IR-2, IR-3, IR-7, IR-8, IR-16	Stakeholder record §3.1, §3.3 (AA and IC lenses)
11. Learning machinery	IR-17, IR-18, IR-19	Futures disciplines; Allocation SP-8

13. Closing

The chair you now hold concentrates authorities the system used to distribute, in a season the system used to consider extreme, under scrutiny the system used to reserve for catastrophe. None of that is within your control. What is: nearly every action in this catalog is a preseason build, signed on ordinary days, by an officer who already holds the pen. The incident record this body of work rests on can be read as an indictment; read it instead as a price list — every artifact above was costed there at full price, once, by people who did not have it when the lightning came. You can have all of it for a signature and a calendar. The futures analysis closed on the observation that the futures that work are the ones where the instruments arrive. For the chair you sit in, the instruments are these, and the quarter in which they can arrive cheaply is the one you are in now.

About the Author and Cogplexiti

Jayson Coil is the founder of Cogplexiti LLC, an Assistant Chief with the Sedona Fire District, and a Type 1 Operations Section Chief on Southwest Incident Management Team 1. A U.S. Army Sapper veteran and red team instructor, he has spent his career at the intersection of operational command and the study of how organizations decide under uncertainty — helping develop systems agencies use to manage major incidents, and teaching and presenting for the National Fire Academy, the U.S. Forest Service, the Department of the Interior, FEMA, the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and NATO working groups on command and control.

This volume is the incident tier of a larger body of work. The *Operational Leader's Field Guide* and the *OLFG Companion: Quick Reference* (Cogplexiti, 2026) operate at the operational-leader level — decision quality, red teaming, communication under pressure, and learning from action, in the individual leader's hands. *The American Wildfire System Under Reorganization* and *Alternative Futures Following the American Wildfire System Reorganization* operate at the system level — the institutions, incentives, and futures within which that work is done. This volume sits between them: incident response and coordination — how the system decides what to protect when demand exceeds capacity, what the people of an incident actually need from it, and what a new administrator must build before the season tests the answer. Together they run from the national architecture to the individual decision.

Cogplexiti helps leaders and organizations make consequential decisions in complex operational environments — through red teaming, decision-quality practice, alternative analysis, and operational leadership development grounded in real command experience. Inquiries: cogplexiti.com · jayson@cogplexiti.com.

What is not built before the event is improvised after it — at a price someone else pays.

When demand exceeds capacity, a wildfire system does not fail all at once. It fails at the seams — in the prioritization calls, the reporting that feeds them, the people who absorb what the system cannot send, and the administrator who inherits decisions made before they arrived.

Triage is local and almost always correct. Allocation is systemic — and it is where a system actually loses.

The Incident Tier is the middle of a three-tier body of work, between the national architecture and the individual decision. In three movements it appreciates the coordination machinery without judgment and sizes a season's resource package to the fire year's clock; draws on the record of a recent significant incident to establish what each stakeholder actually needed, converting that record into seventeen signed-and-staged instruments; and turns those instruments into an action catalog for the officer newly holding agency-administrator authority.

Above it, The System Tier examines the institutions, incentives, and futures of the American wildfire system. Below it, the Operational Leader's Field Guide addresses the leader's own decision discipline under pressure. Read together, they run from the national architecture to the individual decision.

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Complexity Meets Capability: Equip, Empower, Excel