

Operating Guidelines and Governance



For the Northwest Fire Science Consortium

*A member of the Joint Fire Science Program
Fire Science Exchange Network*



Effective FY 2024–2025



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I. General provisions

These operating guidelines define a structure and governance for the Northwest Fire Science Consortium program (NWFSC), initially funded by the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) in 2012 and a member of the JFSP Fire Science Exchange Network (FSEN).

Overall purpose

The purposes of the Guidelines are to ensure processes are identified that guide operations of the NWFSC. The Guidelines cover functions and actions of the Operations Team (OT), Steering Committee (SC), Partner Sensing Group (PSG), NWFSC staff and partner interactions.

Vision statement

The Northwest Fire Science Consortium (NWFSC) is a multi-organization collaborative meeting the diverse needs of fire science users and producers in Washington and Oregon.

Mission

1. To provide a delivery system for the effective dissemination and accelerated user adoption of relevant fire science information, knowledge, tools, and expertise.
2. To provide a framework within which a variety of existing institutions and outreach programs focused on fire science delivery and dissemination in the Northwest can operate more effectively.
3. To establish the NWFSC as the preeminent organization in the Northwest for assessing research needs of fire managers, delivering fire science, and fostering two-way knowledge exchange.
4. To provide a venue to increase researcher understanding of science needs of diverse stakeholders
5. To conduct on-going evaluation of the effectiveness of NWFSC efforts and adapt our approaches and activities to consistently meet the needs of fire science users.

Values

We subscribe to the set of core values outlined by the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) Governing Board when establishing the regional fire science networks. These include:

1. Be inclusive, making sure all relevant partners have the opportunity to be involved;
2. Serve as neutral science partners;
3. Be end-user driven, both in how we are structured and how we function;
4. Operate collaboratively, fostering joint management and science communication;
5. Be innovative, pursuing new and creative ways to disseminate knowledge;
6. Facilitate the flow in fire science information, dialogue about new science findings, and needs of resource managers and policymakers;
7. Be accountable to all partners, end-users and JFSP rather than just individual institution interests;
8. Maintain focus on six key JFSP objectives, through which our role is to:
 - a. Disseminate information and build relationship
 - b. List and describe existing research and synthesis information
 - c. Identify and develop methods to assess the quality and applicability of research
 - d. Demonstrate research on the ground
 - e. Support adaptive management
 - f. Identify new research, synthesis, and validation needs

Audiences and outreach

Our audiences include, but are not limited to, the following groups:

- Fire and fuels managers and practitioners within the NWFSC’s operating boundaries (Tribal, federal, state, local).
- Public and private entities engaged in forest stewardship, wildfire risk reduction, fire response, prescribed burning, and/or smoke management.
- People and organizations focused on fire-adapted communities.
- University and agency researchers engaged in applied fire research from a diversity of perspectives and have an interest in undertaking stakeholder-driver research.
- Local, regional, state, and federal policymakers.

We use diverse science engagement mechanisms to reach audiences. Some examples include:

- Maintaining a useful and accessible website that is regularly updated with new fire science and NWFSC-led products
- Regular newsletters
- Outreach through social media venues
- Hosting and contributing to field tours and demonstrations
- Sponsoring, attending, and otherwise contributing (presenting, organizing, exhibitor table, etc.) to national and regional events such as workshops and conferences
- Publishing research briefs, syntheses, and other written or graphic documents to meet identified science delivery objectives
- Hosting webinars
- Attending meetings and events initiated by partners organizations
- Participating in Extension programming and workshops

Organizational makeup

NWFSC is comprised of four core organizations: Oregon State University, University of Oregon, Washington State University, and the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station. Additional partnership organizations are represented on the steering committee (NW Climate Adaptation Center, USFS Region 6), and through the partner sensing group.

Funding

Consortium funding is provided by the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP). Funds are provided via a grant award from JFSP to Oregon State University (OSU) in response to a competitive Funding Opportunity Notice (FON) process. The JFSP Governing Board reviews and provides funding recommendations for submitted proposals. Funds are allocated from OSU to the University of Oregon and Washington State University Extension via agreements. OSU and the PNW Research Station also contribute in-kind capacity.

Supporting governance documents

Supporting governance documents are available in the shared NWFSC Steering Committee Governance folder, currently located on OSU’s Box file-sharing system. Any changes in location of shared files will be communicated with the NWFSC team promptly.

a. Charter

This charter provides the structure and operating rules of the NWFSC. It is updated at the onset of each new funding cycle to ensure the ongoing effectiveness and performance of the NWFSC. Revisions are approved by consensus of the Steering Committee (see Section IV).

b. Community Guidelines

Community guidelines are general agreements about interaction and collaboration at all levels of NWFSC governance and engagement with external partners. They are intended to create a supportive culture where different forms of knowledge, experience, and positionality can be engaged and respected. Proposed guidelines for 2024-2025 are adapted from those developed by the OSU Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Program.

Respect yourself

- Take care of your needs.
- Be patient with your own learning and experiences.

Respect others

- Recognize that we all come as whole people with different circumstances.
- Be mindful of power, positionality, and privilege.
 - Acknowledge the perspectives and knowledge of everyone here, regardless of how long they have been with the NWFSC or their position.
- Default to inquiry over judgement
 - Listen actively with an open mind to seek understanding.
 - Engage in dialogue with curiosity.

Respect the shared experience

- Reflect on intent and impact of what you are sharing, and how it may be experienced by others.
- Remember we are all learning, and we all learn differently.
- Allow others to complete their thoughts.
- Be patient with technology and tools.
- Engage in the process, following the agenda and facilitation provided.

Focus on constructive sharing of ideas and solutions and encourage generative discussions that draw on everyone's assets.

c. Practices for Science Engagement

The NWFSC has prepared recommended practices for science engagement. These are intended to support the NWFSC, partners, and audiences in creating safe, productive learning environments in a variety of formats. [Guidelines](#) are available on the NWFSC website on the "[Working with us](#)" page.



II. Program structure

The program structure outlined below is intended to describe roles and responsibilities for each component of NWFSC governance. Descriptions are not intended to act as limitations and can be adaptive as needed. NWFSC is broadly encouraging and will endeavor to support any individual wishing to be increase contributions or involvement regardless of the level of governance.

The Northwest Fire Science Consortium is directed by a lead Principal Investigator (PI) at Oregon State University. The Operations Team is comprised of the lead PI plus the Institutional PIs from the other three core organizations (UO, WSU Extension, US Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station) and the NWFSC Program Coordinator. The Operations Team (OT) is responsible for setting NWFSC direction and priorities. It oversees all NWFSC operations, providing leadership, direction, and approval for activities and priorities while ensuring that proposed deliverables are met as well as reporting requirements. The OT also leads engagement with the other levels of NWFSC governance through regular updates and participatory processes.

The Steering Committee (SC) includes a wider group of members responsible for the proposed work of the NWFSC. This includes additional partners from each core organization who contribute to deliverables as well as partners from other organizations that are aligned with, supportive of, and involved with NWFSC outputs. SC responsibilities include:

- Providing general input on NWFSC operations by discussing progress and advising on the implementation of deliverables;
- Ensuring that direction and priorities remain relevant and responsive to a broader group of needs as represented in members' home organizations;
- Serving as ambassadors for NWFSC by sharing progress and deliverables with their respective audiences;
- Supporting needs assessment and program evaluation efforts;
- Contributing to work on deliverables in appropriate ways; capacities and commitments to NWFSC deliverables will vary among members.

The Partner Sensing Group (PSG) provides higher level strategic direction, guidance, and advice from the management and science communities and includes a diversity of partner institutions at local, state, federal levels. The PSG plays a key role in guiding NWFSC needs assessments and in high-level review or evaluation of NWFSC work and accomplishments with an emphasis on end-user impacts. The PSG is composed of representatives from each state as well as key from organizations core to accomplishing the proposed plan of work, collectively representing a range of end users. PSG responsibilities include:

- Reviewing accomplishments, outcomes, lessons learned, and workplans.
- Helping to design and engage end users in needs assessments, particularly for diverse representation and inclusion of underrepresented groups.
- Helping sense and share the needs of their own organizations and networks in roundtables that the NWFSC organizes.
- Networking and sharing NWFSC activities and outputs within their organizations and partnerships.

Members on both the SC and PSG commit to 2-year renewable terms or for the duration of the funding cycle. Travel costs for SC and PSG members are borne by the members' organizations whenever possible and by the NWFSC otherwise.

III. Operations Team (OT)

Operations Team composition

Currently Consortium operations are based at four lead institutions. The Principal Investigator and a full-time Program Coordinator are located with Oregon State University in Corvallis, OR. One member is located at the University of Oregon in Eugene, OR; one member is located at Washington State University Extension; and one member is located with the US Forest Service PNW Research Station. Collectively, these four institutions are directly responsible for leading the science delivery programming.

OT member term & succession

The lead institutions will be represented on the OT, although the specific individuals serving as OT members may change as the NWFSC evolves. Membership length is determined by the duration of the funding cycle, which is typically a two-year period. Members may serve across funding cycles without limitations on length of service. If a member leaves a position during their term, membership on the OC will be switched to another person within the organization.

OT meetings & teleconferences

The OT meets monthly via Zoom. Additional meetings, either electronically or in-person, may be called as necessary. The process to find suitable meetings times is facilitated by the NWFSC Coordinator; OT members are responsible for filling out any polls or email/phone inquiries to find compatible times promptly on the timeframe requested by the coordinator. Electronic communications such as emails and phone calls may be used as needed outside scheduled meetings times for progress updates, decisions on projects, or other needs that arise. When members cannot participate in scheduled meetings or calls they should let the lead PI and Coordinator know as soon as possible so that appropriate measures can be taken to either reschedule or to provide the absent member with any necessary updates from the meeting. Notes from each meeting will be sent to OT members within five business days of the meeting.

Other committees

The OT may establish ad hoc committees to conduct studies, accomplish a group of deliverables, or lead other activities in support of NWFSC planning, operations, and workplans. A charge for each committee will include the purpose, duration and composition of the committee and other appropriate information to be determined by the OT and recorded in meeting notes. All such committees include at least one OT member.

For FY24-25, several workgroups have been formed. These serve as dedicated project teams leading and managing the implementation of deliverables: three science application bundles on key topics, needs assessment, and social vulnerability and equity virtual summit. A team involving additional partners will also be formed for planning of the westside fire knowledge summit event.

OT decision process

The OT aims to operate by consensus (all members agree with or can support the decision). When key decisions that require discussion need to be made (e.g., decisions affecting members' roles and responsibilities, or decisions to change core operations/structures), all members must be present. However, it is inevitable that members will miss meetings and/or conference calls. In the event that ongoing, operational decisions must be addressed without full membership, the following guidelines apply: reasonable effort is made to determine the member's views/position before the meeting; before decisions are finalized after the meeting or call, the missing member's input is requested in writing. For minor (non-programmatic) decisions, consensus must only be among those present, but all decisions will be recorded in call notes for non-present members to review.

In the event that consensus cannot be obtained on any issue, the OT may defer the issue for further discussion and negotiation. If the issue cannot be deferred, or if additional subsequent conversation does not build consensus, the OT may use simple majority to decide an issue. If a decision is not made by consensus, the process used and minority opinion will be documented in the meeting minutes.

OT governance roles

Major governance roles include ensuring fiscally responsible decision making and budget execution, oversight and priority setting for the annual program of NWFSC activities, and ensuring that completion of deliverables, annual reporting and planning are completed in a timely manner. OT members represent NWFSC in a wide variety of contexts, serving as key “ambassadors” for the Consortium, soliciting feedback and ideas from ongoing interactions with the fire management community. Members also represent their home organization and, at times, should present the needs and views of their organization.



IV. Steering Committee (SC)

Committee composition

The Steering Committee (SC) includes a wider group of members who hold responsibility for contributing to the proposed work of the NWFSC. This includes additional partners from each core OT organization who are responsible for contributing to deliverables as well as partners from other organizations that are aligned with, supportive of, and involved with NWFSC outputs. Current SC members are represented on the NWFSC websites "About us" page.



Committee member term & succession

SC membership length is determined by the duration of the funding cycle set by JFSP, which is typically a two-year period. Members may serve multiple terms across funding cycles without limitations on length of service. If a member leaves a position during their term, membership on the SC will be switched to another person within their organization or another partner organization may be asked to participate. SC membership may also change at any time in response to needs or opportunities that arise.

Committee meetings & teleconferences

The SC meets for two hours, quarterly (four times a year) via Zoom. Additional meetings, either electronically or in-person, may be called as necessary. The process to find suitable meetings times is facilitated by the NWFSC Coordinator; SC members are responsible for filling out any polls or email/phone inquiries to find compatible times promptly on the timeframe requested by the Coordinator. Meeting agendas are determined by the OT and will be sent out by the Coordinator at least three business days prior to the meeting. All SC members are encouraged to communicate agenda topics that they would value with members of the OT for inclusion at any time. Meetings will be facilitated by OT members while presentations and discussions may be led by any member of NWFSC or guests.

Electronic communications such as emails or phone calls may be used as needed outside scheduled meetings times for progress updates, decisions on projects, or other needs that arise. When members cannot participate in scheduled meetings or calls they should still review the agenda for and notes from the meeting and let both the PI and Coordinator know if they have any issues with any topics, decisions, planning, or other matters of business or discussion. Meetings may be video-recorded and stored on the NWFSC box folder for future reference. Notes from each meeting will be sent to all SC members by the NWFSC Coordinator within five business days of the meeting.

SC decision process

The SC aims to operate by consensus (all members agree with or can support the decision). However, it is inevitable that members will miss meetings. For minor (non-programmatic) decisions, consensus must only be among those present; for key programmatic decisions, every effort will be made by OT members to reach every SC member for input. All decisions regardless of scale will be recorded in call

notes; SC members who are not able to attend a meeting should review notes and reach out to the OT with any input or concerns.

In the event that consensus cannot be obtained on any issue, the SC may defer the issue for further discussion and negotiation. If the issue cannot be deferred, or if additional subsequent conversation does not build consensus, the SC may use simple majority or will defer to the OT to decide an issue. If a decision is not made by consensus, the process used and minority opinion will be documented in the meeting minutes.

SC governance roles

Major SC governance roles include providing guidance on NWFSC operations and processes that are conducted to accomplish the proposed plan of work; providing oversight and priority setting for the annual program of activities; supporting needs assessment and program evaluation efforts; and representing NWFSC in a wide variety of contexts. SC Members are key “ambassadors” for the Consortium, soliciting feedback and ideas from ongoing interactions with the fire management community. Members also represent their home organization and should present the needs and views of their organization with the broader NWFSC team as appropriate to ensure that NWFSC activities are responsive and relevant to end users.



V. Partner Sensing Group (PSG)

The PSG reviews NWFSC accomplishments, outcomes, and workplans; helps design needs assessments and engage end users; shares NWFSC outputs with their networks; and develops recommendations for fire science information and technical assistance needs, science delivery opportunities, ideas for possible new research and objective evaluations of the NWFSC's activities and progress toward meeting its goals.

PSG composition

The PSG is comprised of individuals who represent federal, state, private, non-profit, and collaborative organizations that are producers or users of fire science in the NW region. Potential members are identified by the SC and invited by the lead institutions on the OT to participate

Group member term & succession

PSG members will be invited to serve two-year terms or for the duration of the funding cycle established by JFSP. When a member's term ends, the individual and the NWFSC PI will jointly decide if their term will renew; ongoing participation will be verified by OT members at each new funding cycle. If a replacement PSG member is needed, the position may be switched to another person within the same organization or a new member may be recruited from a different organization, with a focus on maintaining a diversity of organizations and agencies across the PSG.

PSG engagement

The PSG will meet at least once annually for a needs sensing roundtable. Periodic written updates, requests for review or input, or one-on-one or small group check-ins will be arranged as needed. Meetings will be primarily held via Zoom, but in-person meetings may be organized. PSG Engagement will be led by members of the OT with oversight by lead PI. SC members are invited but not required to attend meetings organized with the PSG.



VI. Consortium staff

The **lead Principal Investigator (PI)** from OSU is responsible for oversight of JFPS funds, supervision of the Coordinator, and leadership of the direction of the NWFSC in collaboration with the Coordinator and Operations Team.

The **Program Coordinator** is responsible for ensuring the effective functioning of the NWFSC governance structure and science communications. They represent the NWFSC and communicate clearly about its roles and what it offers and support all other members of NWFSC with science delivery, program development and outreach, program coordination and management, and service tasks as outlined with examples below:

Science delivery tasks, examples:

- Design and produce educational materials in a variety of written and media formats. This may include formats such as fact sheets, research briefs, technical reports, case studies, syntheses, infographics, podcasts, videos, story maps, and others.
- Develop communication materials, technology transfer, and science integration methods with relevant science based on needs of target audiences.

Program development and outreach tasks, examples:

- Design, develop, market, and deliver education and outreach programs for diverse audiences which may include workshops, seminars, presentations, conferences, webinars, field tours, and other events;
- Manage outreach events and conduct follow-up, including evaluations;
- Develop and maintain relationships with internal and external partners to better understand the needs of diverse partners and audiences and to strengthen the impact and relevance of NWFSC's work;
- Partner with other FSEN exchanges on product development and program delivery as appropriate;
- Networking efforts to expand the reach and impact of NWFSC's programs;
- Lead efforts to assess the needs of target audiences under the supervision of the PI, and use results to focus program development activities;
- Maintain the NWFSC website (updating research database, updating calendar, trouble-shooting any website issues) and monitor website usage via Analytics;
- Lead the NWFSC newsletter efforts and maintain the listserv
- Lead social media communications.

Program coordination and management tasks, examples:

- Conduct and support NWFSC's day-to-day activities and operations, including prompt response and tracking for requests for information;
- Organize and help facilitate the NWFSC OT, SC, and PSG meetings;
- Provide materials and access to materials for all other NWFSC members;
- Participate in JFSP FSEN meetings;
- Help prepare proposals for funding;
- Lead reporting efforts (e.g., JFSP annual reports, regular updates and recaps for different governance teams, etc.);
- Track progress on deliverables and ensure grant deliverables are met.

Service tasks, examples:


- Establish and maintain professional relationships with appropriate groups, organizations, partners, and audiences;
- Contribute to equity, inclusion, and diversity as part of programming, science delivery, and other NWFSC efforts.
- Engage in training and professional development opportunities that will improve competency in the tasks outlined for this position.

VII. Reporting, documentation, and workplan tracking

Consortium reports are prepared to meet JFSP requirements and shared tracking documents are maintained to best capture workplans for proposed deliverables as well as progress for required reporting efforts.

1. Annual progress reports. The NWFSC submits an annual report to JFSP no later than required by JFSP. The report follows instructions provided by JFSP each year to communicate efforts, impacts, and success stories; JFSP instructions may change from year to year. The report is intended for general circulation and is posted on the NWFSC website. The Coordinator leads production of these reports with input from the Operations Team and in response to feedback opportunities provided to the broader Steering Committee.
 - a. Progress tracking sheets with instructions will be provided by the coordinator to all OT and SC members to contribute to for tallying annual impacts in required reporting.
 - b. Additional tracking documents or worksheets may be created by the Coordinator or any committee leads as needed to help facilitate progress tracking on key deliverables, workplan efforts, event planning, or other needs.

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NORTHWEST FIRE SCIENCE CONSORTIUM

ACTIVITY IMPACT STATEMENTS

Key fire science topics that NWFSC contributed to this year

The Northwest Fire Science Consortium (NWFSC) contributed to all the listed fire science topics during FY23. New journal articles and reports on each topic that were published throughout the year were added to our research database and highlighted in our monthly newsletter. Topics that were a key focus of a NWFSC-led deliverable (e.g., a research brief, synthesis, webinar, or workshop) during FY23 are noted in bold.

1. Wildlife	6. Postfire recovery and management	11. Smoke, air quality, and health	14. Social science and human dimensions
2. Invasive plant species	7. Fire behavior	12. Wildland urban interface and infrastructure	15. Indigenous knowledge
3. Vegetation	8. Fire regimes	13. Firefighter safety and incident management	16. Economic impacts
4. Soil	9. Fuels management		
5. Watershed processes	10. Prescribed fire		

1 EXPANDING TRIBAL CONNECTIONS

Key fire science topics: Indigenous knowledge; Vegetation: Postfire recovery and management; Fuels management; Social science and human dimensions

Societal Impacts: Conceptual, Connectivity, Capacity-building

Multiple studies, assessments, and recent federal guidance have increasingly recognized Indigenous knowledge and fire stewardship, and the need to better bridge diverse knowledges in applying fire science to management. A deficiency of available resources, relationships, and capacities to do this work is often noted as one of the most prominent barriers. In a [recent assessment of the Fire Science Exchange Network \(FSEN\)](#), like most other exchanges, the NWFSC was evaluated as having a gap in addressing Indigenous knowledge. Over the last year, we have actively worked to address these identified needs by carefully building expanded relationships with northwest Tribes while compiling existing science on Indigenous stewardship.

Fire and Fuels Monitoring Workshop for Northwest Tribes

In the spring of 2023, we collaborated with the Northern Rockies Fire Science Exchange Network (NRFSE), the Lake States Fire Science Consortium (LSFSC), the Northwest Region of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA-NW), and USDA Forest Service Region 6 to design and host a fire and fuels monitoring workshop for BIA forestry employees. The workshop originated from a need expressed by BIA-NW for entry-level training in fire and fuels monitoring for their forestry personnel. The workshop applied a hybrid approach by: 1) adapting a [digital fire and fuels monitoring curriculum designed by the LSFSC](#) to the NW region, which we conducted live via Zoom, and 2) offering in-person field days to practice and expand on skills in two locations to accommodate participants across the region: Warm Springs Reservation in central Oregon and Spokane Tribal Food Sovereignty Garden in northeast Washington.

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2. Updates to the Steering Committee on key NWFSC efforts and new deliverables will be sent by the NWFSC Coordinator between quarterly meetings.
3. A regular newsletter is sent to the NWFSC listserv. The newsletter is sent primarily monthly, but months may be combined near the end of the year and during the peak of summer to accommodate lower readership during these times. The newsletter is not meant to be a comprehensive reporting effort, but is important for reporting key NWFSC developments and outputs to a broad audience. The Coordinator is responsible for compiling and delivering the newsletter.
4. Biannual progress reports may be compiled and distributed as email updates to the Partner Sensing Group; updates will also be posted on the NWFSC website.