

Expansion of Complex Incident Organizations:

In the recent past, there have been numerous times that existing ICS organizations have had to expand or reach beyond the normal limits. Such situations as Yellowstone 1988, Florida 1998, Montana 2000 and 2003, have validated a need for several things that are not currently taught as theory in the existing curriculum.

- There is often a need for a higher level of Command such as a State-wide Command, Geographic Command and even a National Command for critical resources.
- Branching, or expanding Area Commands is sometimes necessary.
 - Large geographic areas do not fit the traditional theory of Area Command.
 - Limited number of fully qualified and experienced Area Command personnel.
 - Span of Control issues.

Keep in mind that command and coordination are two different entities, with two different functions and two different sets of qualifications. (See diagram 2). Both organizations work for Agency Administrators. MAC does not work for Area Command, nor does Area Command work for MAC etc. but they are to coordinate with one another.

Also remember that as incidents expand we build from the bottom up. Traditionally this goes to Branches with an IMT when they reach 5-6 Divisions. If you reach that limit there are two options:

- Option 1: Order another IMT
- Option 2: Re-design the size geographically and branch.

* In preparedness levels IV and V we traditionally don't have the necessary resources to properly staff all divisions/branches. Expanding IMTs reach (geographic area) with these fewer resources, still brings much needed infrastructure and doesn't exceed span of control recommendations. This same principle can and should be applied to Area Command.

We often order teams and resources until they are gone, then we attempt to figure out ways to get more and more. Better management of what we have is the answer. Putting together an Incident Management Team, Area Command Team, or even a handcrew when all resources are committed and putting them into that situation is directly opposed to all the concepts of safety, training and qualifications we preach. Better utilization early on to slow this need, and better management in Planning Levels III, IV, and V is the key. Where do you want your most experienced personnel during those times? Not managing small areas but assisting in management of large areas, making maximum use of the most critical resources that are in short supply.

-Principles of Branching the Command Function of Area Command-

In addition to the branching, expansion of Area Commands the second issue as listed above is a higher level of command. As States or Geographic Areas compete for critical resources there is a command function to be performed.

In Montana in 2003 for example, 4 Area Command teams within a two state area, plus the area of Eastern Montana were all competing for scarce resources. As Area Commands prioritized incidents within their Area Command, there was also a need for a higher level of Command to decide priorities between Area Commands. Whether this is State-wide or Geographic is immaterial, the need is there. Without that there is no management of the “whole” or entire situation. The same is true nationally when that competition exists between Geographic Areas.

Teaching: Complex Fire organizations

RE: Geographic (state-wide) Command and/or Branching Area Command

- ✓ As a minimum, incorporate into:
 - All levels of MAC training
 - Fire Management Leadership
 - Local Fire Management Leadership
 - I-400
 - S-420/S-520/S-620

- ✓ Key considerations:
 - Pre-plan Geographic or State-wide Command. This is NOT the same as MAC and utilizing MAC for Command is a poor concept. If this is to be done, those individuals need some minimum training and qualifications to do that job. By definition MAC representatives are NOT Commanders. You do need a higher level of “command” than Area Command. This has been demonstrated numerous times since Florida 1998.

 - Pre-plan Area Command “areas” within a Geographic Area, realizing that there are only 4 National AC teams and that you likely would only be given 2-3. Utilizing the Montana 2003 as an example, once you plug an Area Command team into an “area” then expand that AC team with branches rather than ordering additional teams.
 - Some considerations:
 - Not just agency boundaries but logical dispatch/I.A. areas
 - Lines that are easy to define. e.g. Interstate vs Forest Boundary
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 - At the upper reaches of Level IV Planning levels and certainly Level V we are strapped for resources. Early in these levels we need to recognize the following needs:
 - Go early to State-wide or Geographic Commands.

-Principles of Branching the Command Function of Area Command-

- Recognize the potential need for a higher level of command, mixing command and coordination does not work well.
- At these planning levels, from the beginning direct Area Commands to expand (branch) rather than immediately order additional Area Commands.
 - It is possible to pre-determine the maximum number of Area Command per state or Geographic Area prior to the season.
 - Building additional (such as the 5th) Area Command Teams or IMTs is directly opposed to efficiency.
 - Utilize these individuals to expand existing teams.
 - As an example: Instead of building a 5th AC Team utilize these individuals to build as many as 5 branches to existing AC Teams. Can cover the same area as 5 additional teams.
- Geographic and National MAC will have to be trained in these concepts as well as state-wide commands.
- Same concept on Area Command, especially at Level IV and V, you branch before you order other Area Command Teams.

Organizational Principles of Branching Area Command

- ✓ As taught in I-400; ICS allows for branching “Functional” aspects at the “chief” level. Specific examples exist for Operations, Plans and Logistics.
** **THIS IS DIFFERENT THAN THE BRANCHES UNDER A “CHIEF”**. As an example: Logistics might be split into two branches at the chief level on a large incident separated by a river or mountain range. With a North Logistics and a South Logistics Branch Director reporting to one (1) LSC. This is very similar to the old “zone” concept applied to a specific function. The term zone could be applied and would be familiar to many, but “Branching” is already part of ICS , this concept has just not been applied at this level of complexity.
- ✓ These branches should be **named** and not numbered to indicate a primarily “functional” branch. Although a branch at this level would likely be both functional (command) and geographic to manage span of control. Reasons for naming and not numbering:
 - So not to be confused with Operations’ Branches
 - To reflect a “functional” branch with a descriptor of the incident. On an Incident (I-400 sample) it might be Big Creek Logistics North Branch; or North Logistics Branch Big Creek Incident; Examples for Area Command branching of the Command function:
 - Kootenai Branch Flathead Area Command
 - East Branch Flathead Area Command
- ✓ It is important to Branch only Command (1 person as Branch Director) to do the AC functions and coordinate with the other functions.
 - Branching and utilizing Planning, Logistics and Aviation at each Branch would require too many qualified people that are not available. That would be like assigning several mini-Area Command Teams.
 - When looking at the functions of critical resource allocation, coordination of demob etc. these can be performed by the AC Branch Director and coordinated with the overall Area Command staff. It is important that the Branch Director not build a staff or it will defeat the purpose. Remembering the expansion of ICS not duplication of organization.
- ✓ Written Delegated Command authority to the Branch Director should NOT be done. It is understood. This would begin to build a staff at that level to “re-delegate” etc. IMTs still report to the ACDR through the AC Branch Director. In the delegations to IMTs it should be noted that if AC is Branched, that the Branch director will have the authority to allocate and re-allocate critical resources, etc. within the branch.

- ✓ Ideally Area Command Branch directors would be qualified at the Deputy Area Commander level. It is plausible to utilize Assistant Area Commanders. Successful completion of S620 Training and performance at the Type1 Command or General Staff level would appear to be the minimum. Additionally “qualified retirees” could be utilized in these slots as they would still be reporting directly to an Agency ACDR.
- ✓ Under ICS there is no reason you cannot branch the Command function in Area Command. In doing this, you expand the capability of Area Command. By adding two Branch directors you easily manage 10 IMTs. In looking at the ACDRs span of control, once you have added just 4 IMTs (ICs) to his/her staff, the span of control exceeds 7. This concept is capable of easily expanding to 15+ IMTs under a single Area Command by adding 3 Branch Directors while still keeping the span of control at the recommended 5-7 for the ACDR. Traditional thinking would call for 4-5 Area Commands minimum. Not realistic. From the Florida 98, Montana 2000 experiences this can be done and is necessary to maintain span of control or extreme distances. Not to mention the critical resource shortage of AC Teams. (Florida 98 had 13 IMTs under one AC operational and 21 IMTs total when including incoming and transfer of command) Sample below with 10 IMTs. REMEMBER, IT’S NOT AN OPERATIONAL BRANCH.

*“Sample” NW Montana Area Command
Diagram #1*

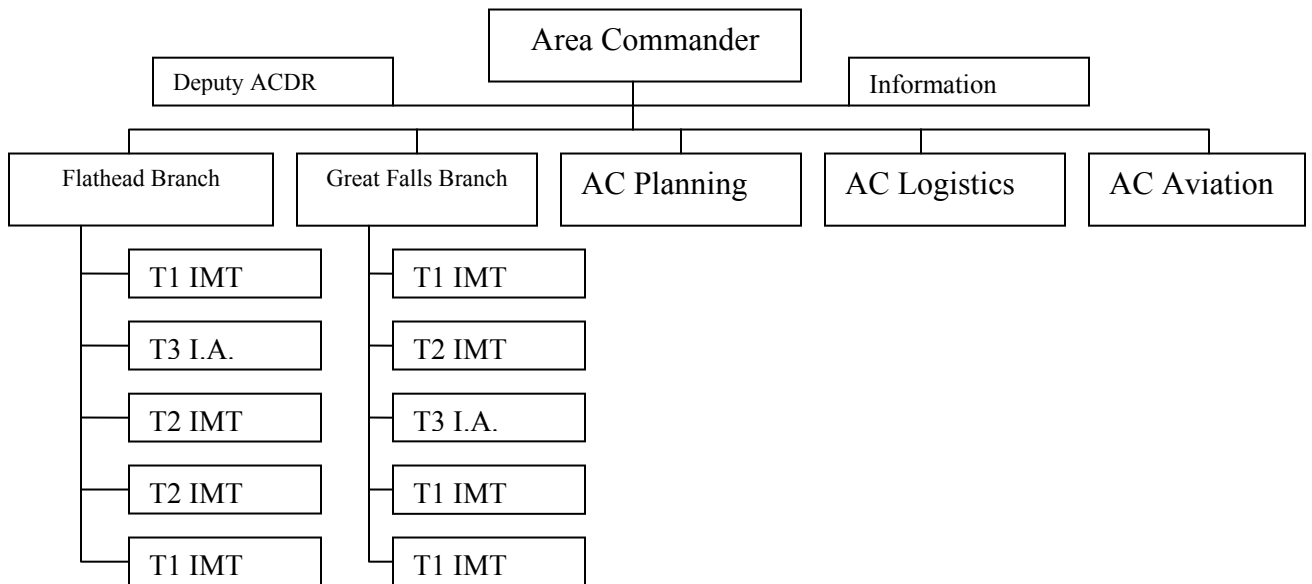


Diagram 2: Command vs Coordination

