ROSS Partner Conference Call Notes
June 19, 2003

Participants:

- ROSS Team—Beth Grey Cloud, Sue Roussopoulos, Steve Tarver, Janet Gradwell, Rex Alford, Andy Gray
- Southern—Wendy Tolman
- Rocky Mountain -
- Southwest –
- Eastern – Ann Stegmaier
- Northwest- Phil Cardin, Dave Quinn, Kit Kemsley
- Western Great Basin –
- Eastern Great Basin – Karen Feary
- Northern California –
- Southern California –
- Northern Rockies – Rosanna Finley
- Alaska-
- NICC – Matt DeLong
- Other – Jane Keller (FS "Enterprise" person)

Note: Additional "post-conference call information," if any, is shown in bold text below.

Project Update—Andy Gray:

Jon asked me to pass on a few of his thoughts:

- The Southwest Area continues to use ROSS extensively
  - It's going fairly well
  - Some difficulties stem from training not all being completely, but everyone's learning
- I appreciate everyone's efforts to make ROSS work
- Please read and share the release notes for version 1.2.5.4 (on the ROSS website)
- Direction/guidance for dispatching smokejumpers will be available next Monday (June 23) – similar direction for lead planes will follow.

Implementation Update – Andy Gray/Beth Grey Cloud:

Let's have an implementation update from each area that's represented on the call:

Southern Area - Wendy Tolman -

- Two more training sessions remain: Lufkin, TX and in Kentucky
- June 15 the Area implemented use of ROSS Dispatch
- Still using ROSS for status-keeping

Eastern Area – Ann Stegmaier -

- The last training session was last week – training was well received
- Original Area-wide ROSS Dispatch implementation target date was in September; now July 18
- EACC has been using ROSS since April

- Dual systems (i.e. ROSS and manual) will need to continue because of some states without dispatch centers
- Our last training was completed last week
- We continue to practice – those who are using ROSS like it

Eastern Great Basin Area – Karen Feary -
- We've been having some fires and we're using ROSS, but not too busy yet
- Some glitches in use of ROSS and some with the program itself
- Comment: Would like some follow-up on the shut down of Qualifications import (Redcard and SACS). What's the status and when will it be available again – we've got some imports to do
- Response - Rex Alford: I believe it's down because when the "fix" of the Search button on the Pending Request screen bug was made, something affected the interaction with the qualifications import function. Will follow-up and notify Karen.

Western Great Basin – Beth Grey Cloud (ROSS Support Team member assisting the Area in Elko, NV) –
- Pretty quiet so far – just initial attack activity occurring
- The Area is just coming up to speed on ROSS

Northern Rockies – Rosanna Finley -
- Have been using ROSS about a month
- No big problems, but no big fire activity
- Still practicing each Wednesday

Northwest Area – Phil Cardin -
- Are using ROSS – no big fire workload
- Held an Area-wide simulation exercise on Tuesday with several expanded dispatches and initial attack activity
- From my limited view here, it went well – will hold conference call tomorrow to discuss
- Last scheduled ROSS course is this week – approaching 400 users trained in the Area

Additional Implementation Comments – Beth Grey Cloud:
- ROSS-trained dispatchers are being sent to the field to conduct readiness checks (e.g. resources are input correctly, data checks, disaster recovery plans tested, etc.)
- ROSS Support Teams are being sent to areas with activity
    - Currently in place in Alaska, Eastern Great Basin, Western Great Basin and the Southwest.
    - **Support teams are composed of dispatch community folks and ROSS Team Members – ROSS Partners can help staff these teams either in your geographic area or in other areas.**

ROSS Support Team Observations/Lessons Learned:

Beth Grey Cloud:
Some common issues we've encountered:
- "Militia" and EFF/AD dispatchers have not been trained in ROSS before coming in to help

    - No funding available for this pre-incident training in some cases
    - This is an impact on the regular dispatchers to have to bring them up to speed during fire activity
    - Suggest they give "militia" dispatchers profiles on practice and let them at least get familiar with the screens. Point them towards the web-based training and the streaming videos on the web. Also parts of the user guide are available. The reference guide is also posted on the web and will help people in practice.
- Dispatchers need to provide more direction and follow-up monitoring to those doing status (e.g. 3rd tier dispatch offices using ROSS status and FMO's, duty officers and overhead using web status)
    - Double-check to make sure those you think are statusing themselves actually are doing it and that they have had some instruction on how to do it.
    - Overhead designated as team members - Statusing of team members in ROSS seems to be minimal. In a review of several areas teams, some or all of the command and general staff were not available for teams that were up on rotation. Other members of the team were not statused as available. This creates a lag time when trying to mobilize the team because you have to reconcile those members' availability before you can dispatch them.
- How data is entered:
    - For example, rental cars - not sure how best to do these. Seems like there should be a national contract everyone could pull from, but I couldn't find it in ROSS. Some areas are filling them as a new resource, which means that vehicle is permanently in their database, which they don't want because they may never see the vehicle again. Each office needs to know how they are going to dispatch these types of resources ahead of time.

Note: Following the conference call, Rod Chaffee developed the following write-up on suggested ways to handle rental cars in ROSS:

Usually, EERA are NOT pre-established for rental car companies. They rely on the national contracts, but yet we go to the local offices to get the resource. So what do we do...?

Here are two scenarios:
1) If you DO NOT have an EERA with a rental company (and therefore aren't going to status the rental cars), they don't need to be Resource Items in ROSS. When you need to order them, you just create requests for Equipment/Service/Rental Vehicle and Fill with Description.

2) If you DO have an EERA then do the following:
- **In the Organization Screen, create a vendor: "XXXXX Rental Car (City Name, State)." For example: "Hertz Rental Car (Redmond, OR)," and enter the appropriate associated information (i.e. Address, Contact, etc.).**
- **In the Resource Item Screen, create an "Equipment, SERVICE." Name it: "XXXXX Rental Car (City Name, State)" (Hint: Same as Vendor Name you entered in organization).**
- **Highlight the item you just entered and select the Organization tab, adjust the "owner" to the appropriate vendor, and do the same to the "Home Unit". Set**

the Provider to the Government (Non-Dispatch) organization where the contracting officer is located.

- **Select the "Equipment Type" tab and give it the qualification of "Equipment/ Service- Rental Vehicles/Automobile (Rental)."**
- **In the Contract Screen, create a new contract, enter the EERA number and select Purchase Agreement as the type,**
- **Select the "begin" and "end" dates and then pick the vendor (XXXXX Rental Car...).**
- **Select the Organization tab, Highlight the "Contracting Office" and adjust to the Government (Non-Dispatch) organization of the Contracting Officer that issued the EERA.**
- **Select the "Purchase Agreement Item" tab. Select the same qualification as you did when you created the resource item and move it to the right grid.**
- **Create a New Request for an Equipment/Service-Rental Vehicle/Automobile (Rental).**
- **Go to the Pending Request Screen, Service tab, and select the request, select "fill" on the action button, select the "Purchase Agreement" tab and your vendor should be displayed.**

Hint: Suggest you PRACTICE this in ROSS PRACTICE prior to entering in ROSS Production!

  - Data entry needs to be consistent.
    - There is a data entry standard on the ROSS website. We're seeing that most data is named inconsistently and some things are not qualified in as many ways as they should be. For instance a type 2 crew should be qualified as a "type 2," "type 2 or 3," and type "any."
    - Also, we're not sure everyone understands that ROSS doesn't know that if you're an EDSP you are also an EDSD and EDRC. If you want to go as all those things, each qualification should be shown under your qualifications.

Steve Tarver:
Spent time in Southwest and was at the S.E. Zone office during initial attack activity. Some observations:

- It's easy to create requests, but you need to have someone designated to process them or you quickly get behind. This dispatcher checks for locally available resources and then places the requests as appropriate.
- Some confusion over rosters:
  - You can dispatch a resource (e.g. incident mgt. team, engine, type 2 crew) with or without a roster
  - You can dispatch a resource with an NWCG standard configuration or a different configuration
- There have been problems with printed resource orders
  - Current ROSS version (v 1.2.5.4) addresses these and includes more information (e.g. special needs, etc.) on printed orders
- Team rosters: team members have to be shown at least as available locally in order to fill team requests

- We've learned that training and testing can't totally recreate the dispatch environment (e.g. phones and radios going off, etc.) so the key is to be organized before you're covered up with activity.
- Comment – Phil Cardin: The other day I noticed that our (local) team members showed available at NWCC (GACC) although only shown as available locally.
- Response – Steve Tarver: It would help to know if they showed available on a report that NWCC ran, or by name on the Pending Request screen. Even if you designate their availability as local, a report will still show all the resources. Also, with the current version, if someone were to try to dispatch them, a warning message would be displayed on the Fill dialog box saying something like, "Warning: Resource is reserved on the following roster(s)." ROSS displays the resource name, the Roster name, the position (e.g. OSC1) and the Dispatch Center that manages the roster including their phone number. This helps keep team members from being assigned inadvertently as single resources.
- Rex Alford: Let me know if resources available locally are showing up on the Pending Request screen at the GACC, because we'd like to trouble-shoot this and have been unable to recreate the problem.

Sue Roussopoulos:
On my twelfth day in the Southwest leading a ROSS Support Team. Have been in New Mexico and Arizona in expanded dispatch offices.
Here are a few of my observations:

- Need to sit down before you're hit with activity and brainstorm how you'll commit resources in ROSS during (or after) initial attack dispatching
    - If you decide not to use ROSS until you need to request off-unit resources, then you must decide how you will handle request numbers. For example, you've created E-1 through E-5 manually for local IA resources and now you need to generate a ROSS request to order an additional piece of equipment. ROSS will assign request number E-1 rather than E-6 and now you've got duplicate request numbers.
    - **This is a short-term problem since ROSS version 1.2.6, which will be released next month, will allow you to control request numbers** (e.g., you can assign a block of numbers for IA and another block to expanded). There are several ways to handle this issue until then…
        - Assign a different incident order number for your ROSS generated requests (i.e., you will have an IA incident number and another for ROSS).
        - *If time permits*, you can Create/Fill the manual requests (E-1 through E-5) in ROSS prior to creating E-6.
        - Create 5 ROSS requests for "Equipment/Category Not Listed/Not in Catalog". Multi-select these requests and add documentation (e.g., Request filled outside of ROSS. Refer to manual resource orders). Proceed with creating E-6. *You will need to cancel E-1 through E-5 in ROSS before closing the incident*.
- Managing travel is fouling some folks up:
    - If you fill a request with a resource as "Travel to be arranged" and don't later follow-up and enter the travel, the resource cannot be released or reassigned.

    - By the same token, if you fill a request and indicate that the resource will have a "Travel Itinerary" and don't later follow-up and enter the itinerary, you encounter the same problem.
    - If ETD/ETA is entered for resources traveling by commercial airline, you should at least enter the carrier name, flight number and arrival airport in the Mode of Travel block (just as you did in a "dot mob"). Otherwise, it really makes it difficult for the receiving dispatch/incident to discern which resources will need picked up at the airport
    - Note: We are working on Travel reports that will make it easier to view travel for groups of mobing or demobing resources.
- If you're trying to fill a request with a local resource and can't immediately find it, your first course of action shouldn't be to "Fill with New Resource". This will usually result in duplicate records and will create a clean-up mess for you. These are the four main reasons you can't find a local resource to assign:
    - It's not your resource. The request needs to be placed with another ROSS dispatch office.
    - It's your resource but it hasn't been entered in ROSS yet. In this case, you do need to Fill with New Resource. Refer to the Data Standards when naming new resources. If you're directing Expanded to fill a request with one of your local resources, give them a heads up as to whether the resource has been entered in ROSS or not. This will prevent them from creating duplicate resources that will have to be cleaned up later.
    - It's in ROSS, but not qualified/classified in ROSS for the requested item. In this case, use the Search button on Pending Request to locate the Resource by name or by one of its existing qualifications.
    - It's in ROSS but not shown as available (local/GACC/national). Resources must be statused "Available" in order to fill a request.
- Follow the established resource data naming standards – otherwise you'll wind up with duplicate resources or won't be able to find what you're looking for

Beth Grey Cloud:
Some more lessons-learned in the Southwest and in Elko:

- This office experienced a LAN (Local Area Network) outage the other day. Their ROSS disaster recovery plan addressed this possibility and included a toll-free dial-up number for the network, but when they tried it, they found they needed a user name and password.
- Three scenarios your disaster recovery plan should address are loss of:
    - Network
    - Phone lines
    - Electricity
- Also, you don't have to wait for a dispatcher to get to your office for them to help you out. A neighbor can dispatch from their office for you if you give them a profile
- Comment – Steve Tarver: That's right – one of the Southwest Zone offices faxed their equipment orders into SWCC and a dispatcher entered them all into ROSS for them.
- Sue's comment about working out the business rule for entering I.A. into ROSS is a good one.
- Question – Andy Gray: From what you've observed, would any of you recommend one approach over another when it comes to handling I.A. and ROSS?
- Beth:

    - We know you can't use a CAD (Computer-Aided-Dispatch) program and ROSS simultaneously.
    - I'd recommend training an EDRC just to enter new incidents in ROSS and how to commit resources. If they can keep up with that, it'll really buy you some time.
- Steve: I agree – the quicker you can get your incidents entered into ROSS the better your information flow.
- Sue: Make the decision on how you're going to do this ahead of time.
- Beth: There is no set rule or S.O.P.
- Question - Wendy Tolman: Is Web Status operational?
- Response - Beth: Yes, it's working.
- Response - Sue: The only issue is with unavailability periods. People using Web Status can enter whether their resources are available or unavailable, but for some reason, attempts to create unavailability periods (sometimes) result in a message that you can't create an unavailability period because the resource is assigned to an incident even though the resource is not on an incident. So, web status users need to relay their unavailability periods to their dispatcher until this is resolved.

Next call—June 19, 2003 same number.

Beginning on the next page are some suggestions from Beth Grey Cloud and Steve Tarver (ROSS Support Team Leaders) that might help other areas and offices. ROSS Support Teams are also bringing suggestions back to the ROSS Team for application enhancements and to NICC for data standard changes, but just the tips are included here.

Beth Grey Cloud and Steve Tarver's ROSS Tips
Compiled From ROSS Support Team Experiences
June 23, 2003

Beth:

- General Comments: The big issues I noticed were the statusing and qualification of resources, entering of EERAs, training of militia dispatchers, and finding resources in ROSS. All of these added to the frustration and confusion of using the application.

- Offices need to decide how they are going to status resources
    - Will the dispatch do it, the resources supervisor, or the resource itself?
    - Will they always be available until stated otherwise (AD/EFF FFT2s) or will they be "real-time" statused?
    - After this is decided and the implementation of resource statusing has begun, send out an e-mail message to remind people to status.
    - Offer further training assistance if needed.
    - Periodically run reports to see that statusing seems accurate.

- Qualify/classify all resources as they will be (or want to be) dispatched
    - ROSS does not recognize that someone is an EDSD just because they are qualified as an EDSP.
    - If an EDSP will to go out as an EDSD they have to have the qualification entered in ROSS.

- Add every feature a resource has
    - When ordering something, order with the minimum features you will accept.
    - If you have a "nice-to-have" feature, enter it in Special Needs and follow it up with a phone call.
    - Train dispatchers to always check Special Needs (on Pending Requests).
    - Follow up all special need requests with phone calls to be sure the need has been noticed.
    - Note: A change request is in to flag any requests that have special needs.

- Enter all the EERA's that are used regularly (Dozers, Tenders, Engines, etc.)
    - (Some offices had decided not to enter the EERAs until they needed them, which was time-consuming at the time of dispatch).
    - For each type, enter all of the resources in that type (e.g. enter all the EERA's you have for dozers so all vendors show up in the query - this will help mitigate any accusations of favoritism).

- If resources are mistakenly entered with the wrong name, make a note of the new name in the (incorrectly-entered) resource record so you can correctly report later on
    - In other words, if a resource's name is entered wrong and they are dispatched, even though you can edit the name, it doesn't follow through to previous incidents. The only thing you can do is edit the name and make a note in the resource's documentation that it was changed.
    - It gets confusing if you run statistical reports on the resource later on (e.g. how many times it was dispatched). If you run them on the corrected name that's all you'll get. You would have to also run it on the name that was entered first to get an accurate report of the resource's use.
- Same if it was a duplicate, except you'd have to pick the one you wanted to keep and remove the qualifications from the other so it wouldn't show up on the query. Each catalog has a qualification for this (e.g. equipment is "!DELETE DON'T USE"). Qualify them as that so there is no confusion.

- Review the resources entered to date and get a qualified person to enter what is remaining

- The standard for entering resource names should be shared more between the GACCs and units
    - It is posted on the web, but from the looks of it, it isn't referenced very often.
    - There probably needs to be more coordination at the GACC level for this.

- When a person fills a request as a dispatcher, the sending office should be sure they have a ROSS user profile before sending them out
    - Run a report on the dispatcher they have entered in ROSS and be sure user accounts have been set prior to next incident.

- Resources dispatched by initial attack (IA) are not necessarily dispatched in ROSS, which creates two problems:
    - The resources still show available in ROSS. This means anyone looking at the status or ordering resources such as engines, tankers, helicopters, etc. sees them as available and may place an order for them.
    - Everyone has to know there are paper orders for these items. They try to release them in ROSS when they weren't dispatched from ROSS and spend time trying to figure out what they are doing wrong.

  To mitigate this:

- At least create the incident in ROSS. This will get the resource order number going and the finance/charge codes documented.
- If you don't want to use ROSS for the immediate IA dispatch, catch up the requests at a later time to help with the statistics.
- Make remarks on the resource item in ROSS that the resource may have been dispatched on paper and to check there if you can't find the dispatch in ROSS.
- Many offices don't create a resource order right away for an IA request. It's no different here except that other office can now see the status of the resources in ROSS without calling the office.
- Make notification phone calls for committed national resources, and fend off the requests in ROSS for those resources that have been sent on IA.

- Note: Be aware that this creates a potential problem of time stamps. If you don't enter the incident, requests or fills at the time they happen, then the time stamp obviously shows a different time than things actually happened. Making comments in the request is okay, but it isn't easy to see. This probably needs to be put in as a change request. There is no good work-around except the documentation.

- Add more off-the-wall scenarios to practice sessions and add more trouble-shooting scenarios
  - Put in multiple requests at one time
  - Include teams, strike teams, groups, rosters, pre-orders, etc.
  - The Southwest Area practiced extensively with ROSS, but there has been much confusion on how the application works. It seems the practice might have been too controlled both in the requests and the environment.

- Have militia type dispatchers participate in the practice and be given a profile in practice so they can poke around when they have the time
  - Note: The classroom training will be reworked into two sections: "ROSS" and "Advanced ROSS." This will put the most difficult things like Creating a Roster, Pre-orders and Travel Plan in the back. Then if the majority of students are EDRCs, the first part will be able to show them the basics and the more advanced students can stay for the more complicated stuff.

Steve:

- General Comments: We cannot simulate the environment that the dispatcher works in so we must have empathy for what they are going through and organize to be successful.

- The dispatch organization must be organized before the incident so that everyone knows who is going to work on what aspect of the incident ordering process
    - Make one person the conduit for creating requests for one or many resource types depending on their ROSS skill level.
    - Another person must be responsible for working on processing the created requests. The first choice is to fill the request locally which means that they must be on the phone with the resource providers passing and confirming requests. This takes time and it may be a priority to determine quickly which requests cannot be filled locally so that they may be placed to the selection area or up.

- Be aware that printing of resource orders currently is a great impact (e.g. personnel at ICP and vendors wanted/required a paper copy of a resource order)
    - It was taking a minimum of four minutes to print one resource order to fax to a vendor. This is too long.
    - You get interrupted about ten times during the time you are waiting for the printing to complete and must go to other ROSS screens but Brio (report-writing tool) has taken over the computer operations.
    - Note: the ROSS Team is working on solutions to this problem.

- Be aware that on the Incident Resources screen you can search for a specific resource by name, but not request number
    - On the Search dialog box you can find the resource but the request number is not displayed. When the resource doesn't show up on the Incident Resources screen after searching you have no way to find the resource if you don't know the request number.
    - Note: A change request has been submitted for this item.

- If possible, dispatch shops should plan how pre-orders will be handled when IA and Expanded Dispatch are split up
    - If you are not familiar with the dispatch office, pre-orders can be confusing.
    - Pre-orders may contain items that others are telling you to order and if pre-orders have been used, you end up with two requests for the same item and it must be determined if both requests are supposed to be filled
    - For example: a dispatch shop has existing pre-orders setup for mobile showers and food caterer. Those are created and the dispatcher doesn't know what's on the pre-orders. Then the IA desk or IC tells you to order a mobile shower and food caterer. You then create the requests not knowing that they were already on the pre-orders. It's very easy to duplicate requests this way.

- Dispatch centers need to decide if they are going to use ROSS for documenting the sending of IA resources such as the initial engines and miscellaneous overhead at the time the IA action is taking place
    - This has an impact on the IA dispatchers and their support personnel.
    - It would be easier to enter those requests at a later time after the initial rush of activity if it is beneficial to do so. What do they do now? Do they put every resource that is on the fire initially on a resource order? There will always be resources that go to the incident without ending up on a resource order.

- I would suggest that the incident be created in ROSS as early in the IA process as possible
    - This facilitates the creating of financial codes, frequencies and deliver to locations that will be needed if the incident progresses to using ROSS.