PRESCOTT, AZ – July 11, 2021 - A BAER team was established to begin a burned area assessment of the Rafael wildfire. BAER assessments are rapid evaluations of the burned area to identify unacceptable risks on National Forest Service (NFS) lands from post-fire threats and assist land managers in preparing the burned area prior to the first damaging weather event. The team’s focus is on the emergency actions necessary to protect life and safety, property and critical natural and cultural resources on NFS lands. The team also shares burned area information from the assessment with other federal, state and local agencies with post-fire responsibilities on state and private lands both within and downstream of burned areas, including USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Weather Service (NWS), and US Geological Survey (USGS).

BAER teams consist of scientists and specialists including hydrologists, geologists, soil scientists, engineers, botanists, biologists, archeologists and geographic information specialists. The teams collect data during ground surveys and complete GIS and modelling to evaluate the post-fire risks. The first step in the BAER assessment process is taking satellite imagery and data collected during ground surveys to produce a soil burn severity map. The soil burn severity provides the baseline information to determine changed watershed conditions for assessing potential watershed impacts from wildfires. This information is then compiled and presented to Forest Leadership along with recommended BAER emergency stabilization treatments in a BAER assessment report.

The Rafael Fire BAER team has completed its analysis of the fire’s effect on soils, which shows that 63.1% of the fire burned at low severity, 18.6% of the fire burned in moderate severity, 7.2% of the fire burned at high severity and 10.9% unburned. Given the location of the fire footprint, final assessments indicate high risk within Sycamore Canyon Wilderness and the downstream drainage to the confluence with the Verde River. Any potential post fire risk includes hazard trees, stump holes, falling rocks, debris flows and possible flooding with runoff risk to values and property downstream. The BAER team analysis supported no mulching or seeding in Sycamore Canyon due to the terrain and vegetation type. Therefore, there will be no additional treatments other than maintaining the closure area, installing post warning signs to inform the public of post wildfire hazards and completing post storm inspection for identified roads and trails.

Everyone near and downstream from the Rafael Fire burned area should remain alert and stay updated on weather conditions that may result in heavy rains over the area. Flash flooding could occur quickly during heavy rain events.

REMEMBER: The Rafael Fire Area Closure is still in effect on the Prescott, Coconino and Kaibab National Forests. Detailed information and a map are available on Inciweb at Rafael Fire Information - InciWeb the Incident Information System (nwcg.gov)