

Blue Cut Fire Heritage BAER Report

Resource Specialty: Heritage

Fire Name: Blue Cut

Month and Year: August 2016

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I. Potential Values at Risk (identified prior to the on-the-ground survey)

A. Critical Values

Heritage values at risk include prehistoric and historic archaeological sites and ethnographic locations. Many of these values are fragile and their loss is considered irreversible. Examples of these non-renewable resources include the data potentials contained in archaeological deposits with regard to prehistoric populations, environments, and climates as well as historic land use associated with the history of the San Bernardino area. In addition, the local Native American communities are strongly connected to their ancestral lands and cultural heritage located in the vicinity and are vocal in expressing their concerns.

Wildfires have the potential to damage or destroy cultural resources through: (1) direct effects of the fire; (2) ground disturbing suppression or rehabilitation activities; (3) and erosive soil movement caused by subsequent storm precipitation. These impacts may completely destroy prehistoric and historic resources or alter the context of surface and subsurface deposits vital to scientific analysis or interpretation. Wildfires also increase the accessibility and visibility of archaeological site locations making them more susceptible to vandalism, looting and unauthorized recreational activity.

Damage of archaeological materials on National Forest lands is of particular high concern due to OHV activity. Ground visibility and access has been greatly enhanced due to the removal of vegetative groundcover by the fire. Loss or destruction of archaeological materials can be expected as a result of this increased visibility and access.

B. Resource Condition Assessment

(a) Resource Setting

Archaic groups (ca. 8,000-1,500 BP) exploited the general area for thousands of years, hunting deer, rabbits, and other fauna, and harvesting yucca, pinyon, and other floral resources. Towards the end of the archaic period, a weapons-system shift from the atlatl to bow and arrow use occurred. Concurrent with the adaptation of the bow and arrow came a host of technological and cultural changes including the manufacture of ceramics, decreased nomadism, regional differentiation, and extensive trade networks.

The Serrano (Spanish for “mountaineer”) Indians occupied this area of the San Bernardino Mountains at the time of European settlement. According to ethnographic sources the area was likely within the territory of the Amutskajam (Bean et al 1981) or the Amutcakaiem (Stong 1929).

Predicted land use includes seasonal occupation sites, coinciding with hunting, gathering, and food processing activities. Artifacts and features expected as a result of these types of activity include but are not limited to, flaked stone tools and debitage representing tool use, production, or quarry activity, millingsstones associated with food processing, cooking features, and midden deposits.

Vestiges of historic period sites include pioneer trails, refuse dumps, mines and quarries, cabin sites, rock walls, and historic roads and railroads. All of these have the potential to be present in the fire area. An archaeological records search was conducted to ascertain the presence of known cultural resources within and adjacent the burn area. Approximately 100 archaeological sites are known to be within the fire perimeter. Selecting cultural resources to assess involved four steps: 1. Select sites that are eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places based on criteria as described in 36 CFR 60.4. 2. Select sites that are inherently at greater risk of destruction due to the characteristics they possess. 3. Overlay of the known burn intensity, slope, and stream shed information in a GIS with the locations of the various cultural resources. 4. Accessibility of sites.

(b) Findings of the On-The-Ground Survey

Twenty-three sites were identified for on-the-ground assessment based on their location, burn severity, and the possibility of debris flow damage. The remaining sites were not visited due to safety concerns, a lack of potential BAER issues, or the necessity to prioritize a large assessment in a relatively short amount of time.

Eight cultural resources (six prehistoric, two historic) have been identified as at risk from post-fire effects. One historic property, the historic LADWP Boulder transmission (**CA-SBR-7694H**) line, runs the length of the Cajon Pass and is responsible for transmitting electric power from Hoover dam to Los Angeles. The towers are susceptible to an increase in erosion, debris flows, and flooding due to the effects of the fire.

The remaining seven of these historic properties overlap with a heavily used recreation area (mostly off-highway-vehicle [OHV]) which makes these sites particularly vulnerable to increased disturbance. Given the extent of private land adjacent to and within the fire area, the loss of vegetative barriers due to the fire, and the amount of unauthorized cross country OHV use, the protection of cultural resources from the effects of off route use in this location is a concern. The sites of concern are:

CA-SBR-4411H. The “Mormon Trail”. This portion of the trail was laid out as a summit crossing of Baldy Mesa in 1850. The trail was used by Moron Pioneers to enter the San Bernardino Valley.

CA-SBR-9954. A seasonal vegetal procurement and processing site that may have been inhabited by relatively large numbers of people at any given time.

CA-SBR-9956. Prehistoric plant processing and lithic testing/reduction activity area.

CA-SBR-9957. This prehistoric site is recorded as containing at least 34 artifacts, including millingstones, handstones, cores and core tools, chopping tools, and lithic flakes of imported and local materials. Ashy midden deposits are also extant

CA-SBR-10077. Prehistoric vegetation processing and lithic testing/ reduction activity. Use wear on the manos indicates that the site was repeatedly occupied and may represent site that was ancillary to a large habitation.

CA-SBR-10076. This is a small prehistoric plant processing site. The extensive use wear on the metate suggests seasonal occupation and may represent a satellite resource procurement and processing site that was ancillary to a large habitation.

CA-SBR-10078. This large site includes an artifact scatter consisting primarily of ground stone and flaked stone artifacts, hammerstones, and debitage. The site contains multiple bifaces, formal milling equipment, numerous expedient cutting implements, and a relatively high incidence of imported lithic materials. This site has been evaluated as eligible of the NRHP.

(c) Consequences of the fire on values at risk

The increase in visibility will likely lead to increased off-trail OHV use. Features and artifacts on the surface can be damaged or destroyed by unauthorized OHV use and can lead to significant damage at many archaeological sites. OHV impacts at sites can also enable looters to access public land that would otherwise be inaccessible. These disturbances, primarily the damage to features and subsurface deposits, can destroy the site's data potential and integrity which will adversely the site.

Erosion, debris flows, or flooding could damage or destroy some of the historic towers of the LADWP line. In addition to the damage of an historic property, interruption of the line will affect the availability of electricity in Los Angeles.

II. BAER Risk Assessment Refer to: Chapter 2520 - Watershed Protection and Management

Probability of Damage or Loss	Magnitude of Consequences		
	Major	Moderate	Minor
	RISK		
Very Likely	Very High	Very High	Low
Likely	Very High	High	Low
Possible	High	Intermediate	Low

Unlikely	Intermediate	Low	Very Low
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Summary:

The probability of damage or loss to seven of the sites is “likely” due to the potential for increased unauthorized OHV activity through the burn area where vegetative cover once protected the area from OHV access.

The magnitude of consequences is considered “moderate” because the potential for increased and continual unauthorized activity in the area of these sites could result in additional user created trails into the site areas, erosion from these trails, damage to features, and displacement of artifacts, and the potential for looting and vandalism. As long as problems are identified and corrected timely, it would not necessarily be irreversible, although it would contribute to long lasting effects to the sites.

Therefore, the risk to these sites is considered “high”, especially because of the heavy OHV use in this area.

The possibility of damage to CA-SBR-7694H is “likely” and the magnitude of consequence is “major”. This constitutes a “very high” risk.

C. Emergency Determination –

Treatments are needed for the sites that are vulnerable to increased OHV activity and a separate treatment is required for the property that is vulnerable to the effects of increased erosion and flooding.

D. Treatments to Mitigate the Emergency

(a) Treatment Type

The BAER assessment team has proposed an OHV Resource Protection treatment that includes installation of barriers, gates, fencing, and vegetation barriers to try to limit the amount of illegal cross-country vehicle use that is expected due to the lack of vegetation. The OHV Resource Protection treatment will reduce the risk of damage to historic properties from vehicles driving off road. It will also help speed the rate of habitat recovery by reducing the risk of spreading and establishing non-native plants.

Treatment for CA-SBR-7694H is to contact LADWP to evaluate required protection measures.

III. Discussion/Summary/Recommendations

The Blue Cut Fire has increased the accessibility and visibility of archaeological sites making the probability of loss from vandalism/artifact looting and unauthorized recreational activity possible. The magnitude of consequences is moderate. The Blue Cut Fire has put Heritage resources at a high risk of looting and/or unauthorized recreational access. It is recommended that the OHV

resource protection treatment is applied to protect those at risk historic properties.

Because proposed BAER treatments from the team have not been finalized at the time of this summary, no cultural assessment for Section 106 cultural compliance work was completed during the fieldwork conducted. Any proposed ground disturbing treatments including but not limited to, gates or fencing or other barriers in or near archaeological sites, that the Forest plans to implement will require an archaeologist to review for potential impacts to cultural resources. Although much of the burn area within Forest Service boundaries has been previously surveyed, it is recommended that an archaeologist be present to monitor particular areas of proposed work due to the burn off of vegetative cover potentially exposing additional artifacts and features that were not previously visible.

IV. References

- Bean, Lowell J. and Sylvia B Vane, Michael Lerch, and Jackson Young
1981 *Native American Place Names in the San Bernardino National Forest, San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, California*. Report prepared by Cultural Systems Research, Inc., Menlo Park, California, for the U.S. Forest Service, San Bernardino National Forest, San Bernardino.
- Strong, William D.
1929 Aboriginal Society in Southern California. *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 26(1):1-358).

V. Appendices