



# U.S. Forest Service Los Padres National Forest

Date: September 5, 2016

## BACKGROUND

An interagency Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team was formed by the Los Padres National Forest on August 30 to begin a burned area survey of the Soberanes Fire that is burning on federal, state and private lands in Monterey County.

The Soberanes Fire started on July 22 as the result of an illegal campfire and to date (9/4/16) has burned over 100,000 acres. It is the biggest wildfire of the season thus far in California.

While many wildfires cause little damage to the land and pose few threats to fish, wildlife and people downstream, some fires create situations that require special efforts to prevent further catastrophic damage after the fire. Loss of vegetation exposes soil to erosion; runoff may increase and cause flash flooding; sediments may move downstream and damage houses or fill reservoirs and put endangered species and community water supplies at risk.

### What is BAER:

“BAER is an emergency program aimed at managing imminent unacceptable risks to human life and safety, property, or critical natural and cultural resources from post-wildfire damaging events. The Burned Area Emergency Response Team is sent to fires to determine the need for and to prescribe and implement EMERGENCY treatments to minimize threats to life or property and to stabilize and prevent unacceptable degradation to natural and cultural resources resulting from the effects of the fire “This quotation comes from Forest Service Manual 2523.02..Teams identify values at risk from the effects of the fire not in response to fire suppression activities (suppression repair covers that).

### **Critical Values to be considered during Burned-Area Emergency Response**

<b>Human life and safety on or in close proximity to burned NFS lands.</b>
<b>Buildings, water systems, utility systems, road and trail prisms, dams, wells or other significant investments on or in close proximity to the burned NFS lands.</b>
<b>Water used for municipal, domestic, hydropower, or agricultural supply or waters with special state or federal designations on or in close proximity to the burned NFS lands.</b>
<b>Soil productivity and hydrologic function on burned NFS lands.</b>
<b>Critical habitat or suitable occupied habitat for federally listed threatened or endangered terrestrial, aquatic animal or plant species on or in close proximity to the burned NFS lands.</b>
<b>Native or naturalized communities on NFS lands where invasive species or noxious weeds are absent or present in only minor amounts.</b>
<b>Cultural resources on NFS lands which are listed on or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.</b>

In short, the purpose of the BAER program is to prevent damage, not repair damage after it occurs.

### **Mission of Soberanes BAER Assessment:**

The Forest Service role will be to lead a cooperative analysis effort at the moderate and smaller scale watershed levels. These watersheds are made up of smaller watersheds. We will provide these analyses to the State Post Fire Watershed Emergency Response Team, local agencies and landowners to help them finish the analysis themselves. The BAER assessment team will include technical specialists from Federal, State, County cooperating agencies, as well as a consultant retained by the Central Coast Property Owners Association. An interagency flood risk assessment report for “Phase 1” of the Soberanes Fire will be prepared. Phase 1 is defined as the watersheds that are done burning as of September 1, 2016. Generally, this area is north of the Big Sur Watershed and the Carmel Watershed.

- BAER products will include a Soil Burn Severity map and hydrologic, soils, and debris flow analysis. This requires a cooperative effort since almost all of the values at risk are located outside of the national forest with the Forest Service managing some of the upper watersheds. We will assess the moderate watersheds, or in some areas with many values at risk, smaller watersheds for post-fire rain related impacts such as increased peak flow, debris flow potential, increased soil erosion. This will be done across the entire Soberanes 1 BAER assessment area which is approximately all private and NFS lands north of the Big Sur and Carmel Watersheds (see attached image).
- The Los Padres will conduct a second BAER assessment when the Soberanes fire finds its final perimeter, which may be weeks away. This second team will include Forest Service biologists, archeologists, roads, and recreation personnel. Coordinating the assessment effort are: Los Padres National Forest; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); CALFIRE; Monterey County Office of Emergency Services (OES); and the Central Coast Property Owners Association.
- The Soberanes BAER team will produce and share these key products: Soil Burn Severity Map; Debris Flow Probability Map; and a Watershed Response Map. Other data shared will include calculations of increased peak flow in the evaluated watersheds; calculations of increased soil erosion; and a preliminary list of values at risk based on map and cursory ground surveys.

### **What happens with the Interagency BAER Assessment:**

The Interagency BAER large scale analysis will be used by the State Post Fire Watershed Emergency Response team for further refinement at a smaller scale. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will use the information for refining post fire flood mitigation treatments assistance to qualifying private landowners, to the Forest Service for use on mitigating the effects of post fire flooding to National Forest lands and to OES for sharing information with the public.

**Location of Assessment:** Phase 1 will cover all the burned lands north and west of Big Sur and the Upper Carmel River. Phase 2 will cover the remainder of the fire south and east of the two streams.

### **Duration of Assessment:**

Typically, teams have 7 days to complete their Assessments and they are usually done after the fire is contained. The fire is only 60 percent contained. In an effort to support our cooperators we have accelerated our planning and have begun Phase 1. Work schedules will vary by resource and some resources may be done sooner than the 7-day requirement.

### **Cost to Date:**

Approximately \$90,000 dollars to date.