Forest Service BAER team begins post-fire assessment of August Complex South Zone

WILLOWS, Calif. – Oct. 3, 2020 – A Forest Service Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team was established by the Mendocino National Forest to begin burned area assessments of the August Complex South Zone. The BAER team is being led by Forest Service Hydrologist Luke Rutten, Natural Resource and Planning Staff Officer Kendal Young, and Fishery Biologist Dan Teater. Another Forest Service BAER team is tentatively scheduled to begin its assessment of the North Zone of the August Complex in a couple of weeks. Both teams will coordinate with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Weather Service (NWS), US Geological Survey (USGS), Mendocino, Glenn, Tehama, Trinity, and Lake Counties and other federal, state and local agencies as they assess potential post-fire impacts to the burned watersheds.

BAER surveys are rapid assessments that evaluate the burned area to identify watersheds having increased potential for post-fire flooding, sediment flows and rock slides. Since the BAER survey is a rapid assessment to assist land managers prepare the burned area for rainstorms, the team focuses on potential emergency impacts to life, and safety on National Forest System (NFS) land and share the team’s findings with the responsible downstream agencies.

BAER teams may consist of scientists and specialists including hydrologists, geologists, soil scientists, road engineers, botanists, wildlife biologists, recreation specialists, archeologists and geographic information specialists. BAER teams collect data during their burned area surveys to analyze through GIS and computer models and presents their findings along with recommended BAER emergency response actions in a BAER assessment report.

BAER teams utilize satellite imagery and specialist data to analyze and produce a map that shows the levels of burn severity on the watersheds. This is the first step in assessing potential watershed impacts from wildfires to any NFS values that may be at-risk from potential increased flooding, sedimentation, debris flows and rock slides. BAER teams produce a report that describes threats associated with the burned area’s post-fire conditions along with recommended emergency stabilization measures and actions. BAER emergency response efforts are focused on the protection of human life, safety and property, as well as critical cultural and natural resource values such as the water quality of streams and wetlands on NFS lands.

BAER reports are shared with interagency cooperators who work with downstream private home and land owners to prepare for potential post-fire flooding and debris flow impacts. Homes or businesses that could be impacted by flooding from federal land that resulted from wildfires may be eligible for flood insurance coverage from the at https://www.floodsmart.gov/.

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SPECIAL NOTE: Everyone near and downstream from the burned areas should remain alert and stay updated on weather conditions that may result in heavy rains over the burn scars. Flash flooding may occur quickly during heavy rain events—be prepared to take action. Current weather and emergency notifications can be found at the National Weather Service websites: www.weather.gov/sto/ and www.weather.gov/ekal/

August Complex Post-Fire BAER Assessment information is available at: https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/7228/