Erskine Fire Cultural Resources BAER Report

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Introduction

The Cultural Resources input for the Erskine BAER team was a three-tiered effort: 1) identifying values at risk, 2) identifying potential cultural resources conflicts stemming from proposed BAER treatments (Section 106 review), and 3) working with the tribal community to identify values at risk and potential treatment measures. Federal lands impacted by the Erskine Fire are managed by the Sequoia National Forest and the Ridgecrest and Bakersfield Field Offices of the Bureau of Land Management. Although the FS and BLM have somewhat different policies and procedures for addressing post-fire effects, personnel from both agencies worked collaboratively to produce an integrated approach to all federal lands affected by the fire. The following discussion addresses values at risk and lays out potential treatments to mitigate or avoid adverse effects to cultural resources in or adjacent to the fire area.

1. Potential Values at Risk

Fire-effects to cultural resources occur at several levels. The first, of course, are the direct effects of the fire itself—ranging from the destruction of cultural material to more subtle effects such as resetting the obsidian hydration clock or introducing modern carbon into a site's assemblage.[1] Post-fire risks to cultural resources fall into two categories: 1) degradation from erosion, soil deposition, mass wasting and other geological effects brought about by vegetation loss, and 2) increased public access stemming from loss of vegetation cover and resulting in risk for looting, vandalism, and vehicular impacts.

2. Resource Condition Assessment

Resource Setting

Using the forest's GIS layer, archival maps and records, and local information, twenty-four potential VARs were identified in or adjacent to the fire perimeter. An additional cultural resource site was newly identified during the assessment. Ethnographically, the fire is located in the Piute Mountains and the Kern River Valley, a region occupied by the Tubatulabal and Kawaiisu peoples. During the historic period the area of the fire saw repeated cycles of mining and logging associated with the communities of Claraville, and Sageland. Cultural resources located on FS lands within and adjacent to the Erskine Fire perimeter include prehistoric occupation areas, rock shelters, sparse lithic scatters, and historic-period hunting or cowboy

[1] Obsidian hydration is a dating method that uses the rate of water absorption (all glasses absorb water at a very slow rate) to assign a date to obsidian artifacts. Modern carbon contains high rates of radioactive carbon isotopes which can impact the radiocarbon dating of archaeological resources.

camps. Since less than 25% of the fire area has been adequately inventoried for cultural resources, and given the archaeological complexity of the Piute Mountains, it is likely that many other cultural resources have been or will be affected by post-fire effects. None of the sites are located in areas of high burn severity. Cultural resources were chosen for assessment based on risks posed by slopes, proximity to drainages and public access. None of the resources have been evaluated for National Register eligibility and all were assumed eligible for the purposes of the assessment.

Findings on the Ground

Nine sites were visited in the field and assessed for potential post-fire effects. Additional sites located on BLM lands were visited and will be addressed in that agency's reporting. The remaining sites located within moderate to high burn severity were not visited due to a lack of potential BAER issues, or the necessity to prioritize a large assessment in a relatively short amount of time.

3. Emergency Determination

Although all the identified sites are potentially subject to post-fire events, based on the BAER risk matrix, emergency treatments have been prescribed for only three sites. For the purposes of the BAER analysis, a major consequence to a cultural resource is one where post-fire impacts or BAER treatments result in an unmitigated adverse effect as defined in 36 CFR 800.5.[2]

Site #1 is a complex prehistoric site consisting of rock art, bedrock milling features, possible midden soil and an artifact scatter. The fire has exposed the rock art panel and a number of features, making the site more susceptible to weathering, looting and vandalism. Post-fire erosion has the potential to impact surficial and subsurface archaeological deposits and erode the site's potential NRHP eligibility. Perhaps of more concern for this site is the lack of vegetative screening to the public, resulting in an increased risk of vandalism and looting, both of which could adversely affect the resource.

Site # 2 is a complex of prehistoric sites that burned at low to moderate intensity. Resources range from rock art to bedrock milling features to artifact scatters. The complex was likely part of a larger resource that has been largely erased by construction of Lake Isabella. As with Site #1

[2] 36 CFR 800.5 defines an adverse effect to historic properties as an impact that "may alter, directly or indirectly, any of the characteristics of a historic property that qualify the property for inclusion in the National Register in a manner that would diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association."

the fire exposed a number of archaeological features, making them more susceptible to looting or vandalism. Periodic monitoring will be conducted to determine if such a threat is imminent.

Site #3 is a complex of prehistoric sites. Although burn severity is low, the fire opened much of the terrain to potential OHV use and unauthorized route proliferation (a pattern that was observed following the 2008 Piute Fire). OHV impacts could pose an adverse effect to these resources, both in terms of direct impacts to the features and artifacts as well as the potential for looting or vandalism. Periodic monitoring will be conducted to determine if such a threat is imminent.

Implementation of potential emergency rehabilitation treatments will be conducted in compliance with the provisions of the *Programmatic Agreement Among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5),California State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Process for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Management of Historic Properties by the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region* (Regional PA 2013).

The Sequoia National Forest has initiated emergency consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation per the provisions within 36 CFR 800.12, 36 CFR Part 78 & Stipulation 7.11 of the Regional PA.

4. Treatments to Mitigate the Emergency

Proposed mitigation includes planting native seeds (e.g. deer brush) and a program of archaeological monitoring. The objective of the treatment would be to stabilize archaeological deposits within the site boundary and to generally obscure those deposits from public view. Closure is not proposed as such action would likely direct unwanted attention to the resources. Further archival/data base research may reveal other locations in need of assessment.

Site #1
A) Treatment Type: Native plant seeding, lop-scattering down woody debris and archaeological monitoring.
B) Treatment Objective: Protect cultural features of the site from erosion effects and potential impacts from public visitation (e.g. looting and vandalism).
C) Treatment Description: In conjunction with the YCC program and local fire resources, members of the KRRD archaeology crew will gently re-contour soils disturbed by falling trees and rake in native seeds. A fire crew will lop-scatter woody debris to protect loose soils within

the site. Over the next year the site will be periodically monitored by the KRRD heritage staff for post-fire effects and to determine needs for future mitigation measures.
D) Treatment Cost:
E) Probability of completing treatment in first year prior to damaging storms or events: High – the YCC crew is tentatively scheduled for July 21, 2016.
F) Probability of treatment success: Good - the proposed treatment is designed to respond to and forestall post-fire effects as they happen.

Site #2
A) Treatment Type: Archaeological monitoring.
B) Treatment Objective: Assess potential impacts from public visitation (e.g. looting and vandalism).
C) Treatment Description: Over the next year the site will be periodically monitored by the KRRD heritage staff for post-fire effects and to determine needs for future mitigation measures.
D) Treatment Cost:
E) Probability of completing treatment in first year prior to damaging storms or events: High
F) Probability of treatment success: Good - the proposed treatment is designed to respond to and forestall post-fire effects as they happen.

Site #3
A) Treatment Type: Archaeological monitoring.
B) Treatment Objective: Assess potential impacts from OHV use and public visitation (e.g. looting and vandalism).
C) Treatment Description: Over the next year the site will be periodically monitored by the KRRD heritage staff for post-fire effects and to determine needs for future mitigation measures.
D) Treatment Cost:
E) Probability of completing treatment in first year prior to damaging storms or events: High
F) Probability of treatment success: Good - the proposed treatment is designed to respond to and forestall post-fire effects as they happen.

5. Summary and Recommendations

The Erskine Fire has likely resulted in the loss of important archaeological information—a situation compounded by the potential for the post-fire effects described above. Unchecked, adverse effects to the sites described above appear to be likely. Locations where non-cultural resource related treatments are proposed will require review by KRRD Heritage Resource Management prior to implementation—Appendix A contains descriptions of non-cultural treatments proposed to date. Cultural resource survey and site protection measures may also be required for proposed BAER treatment areas prior to implementation.

Appendix A – Proposed BAER Treatments in and near the Erskine Fire Perimeter

BAER teams are federally funded as are many of their proposed treatments. Consequently, BAER treatments fall under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended. Like any other federal undertaking, BAER treatments need to be analyzed for potential adverse effects to cultural resources. If unavoidable adverse effects are identified, mitigation measures are to be developed through consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation.

Engineering

At this writing the following treatments are prescribed:

- Install Information and BAER Warning Signs on (28S24).
- Install Road Closure and Information Signs on (28S24D).
- Boulder Barriers on (28S24D).
- Install Drainage Armor (class 2).
- Install Critical Dips.
- Remove and Salvage of Existing Culvert (selected locations).
- Install Low Water Crossing w/ Drainage Armor (class 2).
- Restore Drainage Functions (culvert inlets and outlets, roadway ditch lines rolling dips and water bars w/ run-off-ditch, maintain cross slopes of roads in-slope & out-slope).
- Storm Patrol (pickup).
- Storm Damage Response (equipment crew).
- Storm Cleanup (spring).

Implementation of potential emergency rehabilitation treatments will be conducted in compliance with the provisions of the *Programmatic Agreement Among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5),California State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Process for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Management of Historic Properties by the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region* (Regional PA 2013).

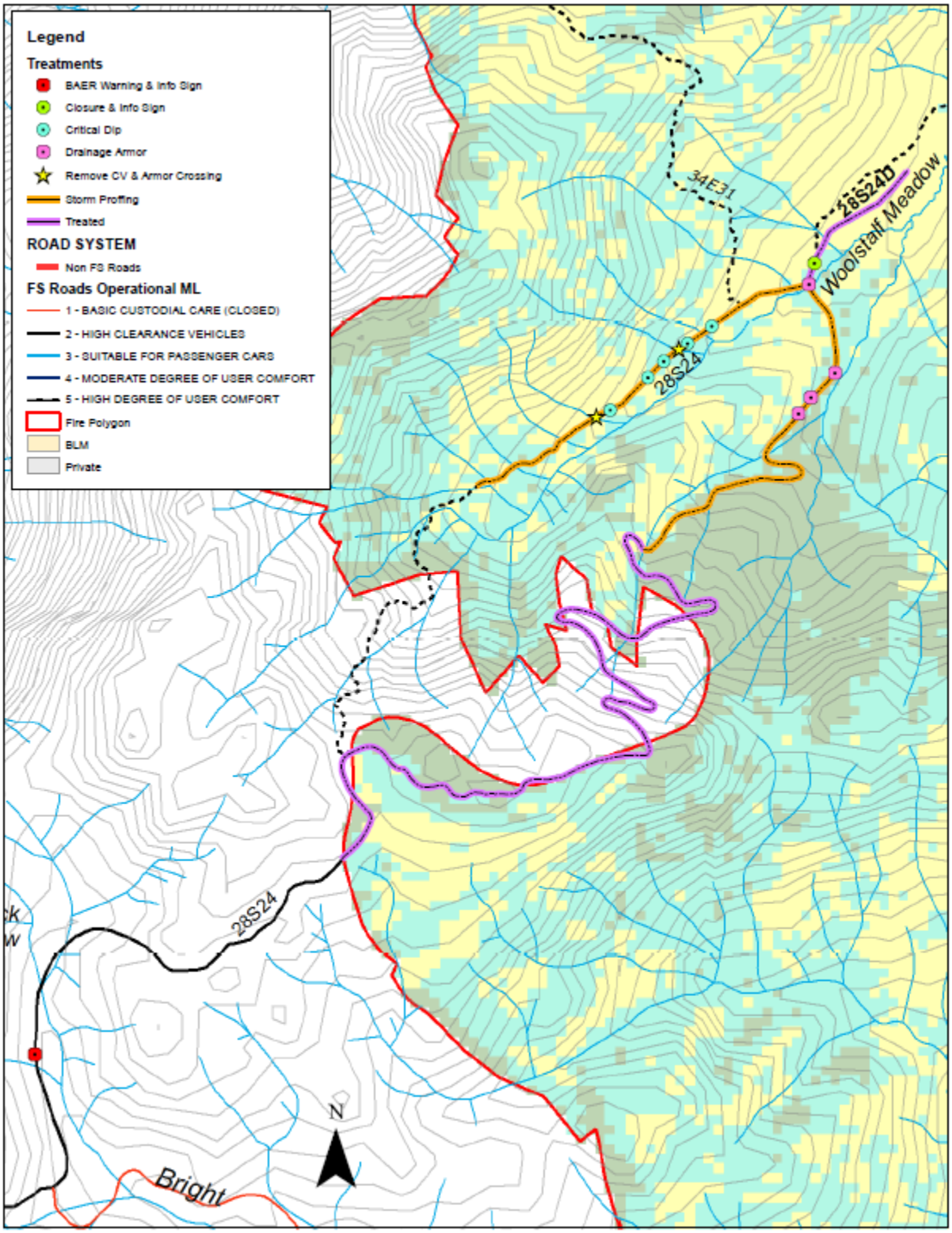

Figure ???. Map of proposed engineering treatments near Woolstaff Meadow.

Appendix B – Tribal Consultation

Tribal Consultation

One of the challenges of cultural resource management in general and particularly with fire assignments is that many sites and other cultural resources values are known only to the tribal community. In an effort to identify values at risk or resource-sensitive treatment measures the BAER team reached out to the local tribal community and held a field trip on Tuesday, July 12 trip to discuss impacts to cultural resources and to identify resource-sensitive treatment measures. Although the tribal community has not (as of this writing) identified any specific values at risk, their input regarding fire and post fire-effects fell into several general themes: 1) treatments within archaeological sites should be minimalist and be designed to fade away within a few years (e.g. planting sterile wheat), 2) some degree of flexibility should be built into the treatment process so that the agency can respond to post-fire impacts should they be identified down the road, and 3) where possible, the tribal community would appreciate the opportunity to participate in on-the-ground treatments as well as archaeological monitoring.