



Central Washington 2012 Wildfires Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Assessment Update – October 5, 2012

BAER Information: (208) 398-3348

Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Begins on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

Wenatchee, WA (October 5, 2012) – The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest assembled an Interagency Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) assessment team to gather information, conduct an analysis, determine the post-fire condition of the burned watersheds, and recommend emergency stabilization treatments for the recent Central Washington wildfires.

The interagency team of specialists, including hydrologists, soil scientists, archaeologists, foresters, engineers, biologists, and geographic information specialists, is comprised of resource specialists from the USDA Forest Service (USFS), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the State of Washington (WA).

The BAER team will generate a report that will identify immediate and emergency actions needed to address post-fire risks to people, property, cultural and natural resources. Wildfire can increase the risk of flooding, erosion and sedimentation, debris flow, reduced water quality, invasive plants, and falling trees and rocks. The BAER team report will contain an assessment of watershed pre- and post-fire response information, areas of concern, values-at-risk, and recommended short-term emergency stabilization treatments for Forest Service land that burned during the recent wildfires.

BAER emergency treatment objectives may allow for a more efficient passage of water to increase protection for infrastructures and watersheds from accelerated erosion, as well as from the spread of noxious weeds within the burned areas, and control access in areas where it is not safe for the public to enter or in areas to allow the natural resources to recover without additional access impacts.

Hazard tree and rock slide detection and removal along trails and roads where BAER activities are necessary, and the installation of safety and informational signage within the fire area may be among the recommended emergency treatments. Storm-proofing for both roads and trails is another available BAER treatment that consists of actions such as removing outside berms, installing critical dips, cleaning debris from culverts, and the placing of rip-rap rock along drainage routes.

In addition to this emergency stabilization response, the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest will begin to plan for long-term recovery management needs that could include salvage, reforestation, and other resource restoration activities.

NRCS is also working cooperatively with the counties, cities and communities adjacent to and downstream from the burned areas to evaluate potential threats to specific businesses, homes, and landowners. Federal assistance to private landowners is the primary responsibility of the NRCS through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program (<http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ewp.html>). Chelan County is sponsoring an EWP grant and will be

working with NRCS to assist private landowners with damage survey reports and recommended emergency measures (http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1045263.pdf).

NRCS is coordinating a workshop with Washington State University that will be held before the end of October that will give private landowners and business owners more information regarding what actions they can take to protect themselves and their property. Additional information for that workshop will be shared with the public when the date and location is determined.

Key BAER Messages

- The communities surrounding the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest live in an environment where the canyons within the burned area can produce flooding and debris flows.
- For their safety, communities need to monitor local weather reports and public safety bulletins, along with local road closures, emergency notifications, weather alerts, follow local county advisories, and act accordingly.
- Multiple agencies, including the US Forest Service and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), are working together and coordinating with local interagency cooperators who assist affected landowners to prepare for rain events.

BAER Team Assessment Progress

- On Saturday, October 6, BAER specialists will begin their field work to ground truth and work towards finalizing a Soil Burn Severity Map for the burned areas within the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.
- The BAER team is communicating and coordinating with NRCS, NOAA, the State of Washington, affected counties, local municipal government agencies, communities, and other interagency cooperators whose authorities include flood control, roads, water supply, wildlife, recreation, and structural safety inspections.
- The BAER team will soon identify basic Values-at-Risk (VAR) within and downstream of the burned areas and will further refine the VAR through its field work and interagency discussions.
- BAER team updates will be provided as the team's burned area assessment progresses.
- Central Washington BAER Team information is available at <http://inciweb.org/incident/3292/>. Also, follow us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/OkaWenNF>.

