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Inyo National Forest
*351 Pacu Lane, Suite 200
Bishop, CA 93514*

Bishop Field Office
*351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100
Bishop, CA 93514*

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Media Contact: Deb Schweizer, (760) 873-2427

Burned Area Emergency Response Team Assembled for Round Fire

A Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team for the Round Fire has been formed. The team is working to complete its assessment and recommendations to lessen immediate hazards to public resources and downstream private land from effects of the fire.

The team is led by geologist Alan Gallegos from the Sierra National Forest. The BAER team is represented by specialists from the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management including a hydrologist, soil scientist, botanist, biologist and archaeologist. Team members have started assessing the fire area to address potential values at risk related to life and property, water quality and critical plant and wildlife habitat.

The purpose of the BAER assessment is to analyze fire effects on soils and watersheds, determine the potential for negative effects, and consider possible treatment options. The potential threat to life and property are always the number one concern and is the first focus of the burned area assessment. Forest roads, including the Witcher Road and Rock Creek Road, are a concern for flood flows at the channel crossings, which may further impact the downstream communities at Swall Meadow.

Soil productivity, water quality, and cultural resources are also at risk when wildfire burns through an area and then is followed by significant storms; particularly during the first and second year following the fire. The loss of natural vegetative cover allows water to runoff across bare soils with increased velocity. Fire also induces water repellency of varying degrees, reducing water infiltration, and increasing runoff. The net result under extreme conditions is a loss of soil, a loss of water control, and significant risk of flooding and debris flows downstream of the fire.

BAER treatments such as road storm proofing, erosion controls, storm patrol and culvert cleaning are important. Treatments may also prevent the spread of noxious weeds. Interagency coordination is necessary where downstream values at risk occur on private lands.

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