



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: CEO
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: August 29, 2017
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Tme: 20 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer
Director(s)
Contact Info: Robert Lewin, Director of Emergency Management
SUBJECT: Whittier Fire Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) Report

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: N/A

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file the United States Forest Service (USFS) Whittier Fire Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) report; and
- b) Determine that this project was found by your Board to be exempt from the provisions of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15061(b) (3) and 15269(a), and that the proposed actions are within the scope of the prior CEQA exemption.

Summary Text:

This item is on the agenda to provide an update from the USFS Los Padres National Forest on the Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team report.

An interagency BAER team was formed by the Los Padres National Forest on July 25th to begin a burned area survey of the Whittier Fire that was burning on federal, state and private lands in Santa Barbara County. The Whittier Fire started on July 8th and burned 18,430 acres and 53 structures. It is still being investigated as to the cause. While many wildfires cause little damage to the land and pose few issues, some fires create situations that require special efforts to prevent further catastrophic damage to fish, wildlife, infrastructure and people downstream after the fire is controlled. 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.

Background:

On August 3, 2017 the BAER Team gave a presentation at the County EOC to local stakeholders, including County staff, on the potential impacts caused by the Whittier Fire that could affect life, safety, infrastructure, the environment and the Cachuma watershed. County staff recognized that the impacts are significant and could cause emergency conditions in the County for two to three years. The problem is further exasperated by the continuing impacts of last year’s Sherpa and Rey fires. Therefore County staff asked the Los Padres Forest to give this brief presentation to the Board of Supervisors.

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. 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

Human life and safety on or in close proximity to burned NFS lands.
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.
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.
Soil productivity and hydrologic function on burned NFS lands.
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.
Native or naturalized communities on NFS lands where invasive species or noxious weeds are absent or present in only minor amounts.
Cultural resources on NFS lands which are listed on or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

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

The Given Mission of the Whittier Fire BAER Team:

The Forest Service role will be to lead a cooperative analysis effort at the moderate and smaller scale watershed levels. We will provide these analyses to state cooperating agencies and local agencies to help them with their analysis. The BAER assessment team will include technical specialists from Federal, State, and County cooperating agencies. The BAER assessment area will be defined as the watersheds that are done burning as of July 30th, 2017. Generally, this area is north of Goleta and over the ridge to Cachuma Reservoir.

- *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 Whittier BAER assessment area.

- *The Whittier BAER team will produce and share these key products: Soil Burn Severity Map; Sedimentation Probability Map; Watershed Response Map; and a Debris Flow Probability 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 cooperators 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 the County Office of Emergency Management for sharing information with the cooperating agencies and the public.

The County Flood Control District is now considering what mitigation efforts will be effective to reduce the impacts to both life and property as well as watershed and infrastructure protection. The Bureau of Reclamation is determining what efforts could be made to protect Lake Cachuma from increased volumes of sedimentation and impacts to water quality. The Office of Emergency Management has held a contingency planning meeting and is coordinating a unified contingency plan to identify strategies to reduce harm to life and property during future storm events.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts: Budgeted: No

Fiscal Analysis:

County Staff will determine if outside funding is available to protect private land outside of the USFS and Bureau of Reclamation lands to implement mitigation measures. California Disaster Assistance Act recovery money is not available for this effort. A contractor maybe required for hydromulching and other erosion control activities.

Staffing Impacts:

County staff will continue to be required for the duration of the threat of flash flooding and debris flows.

Special Instructions:

Direct the Clerk of the Board to send a copy of the minute order of these actions to the following:

Office of Emergency Management, Attn: Sonia Thompson
Flood Control District office, Attn: Christina Lopez

Attachments:

Attachment A: 2017 BAER Report

Authored by: Robert Lewin, Director OEM, (805) 681-5532