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# Understanding Post Disaster Recovery Assistance Available thru EWP

After a fire, the first priority is emergency stabilization to prevent additional damage to life, property or natural resources. The stabilization work begins before the fire is out and may continue for up to a year. Stabilization work is conducted by the Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team.

1. **How do Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) assessments help prioritize the rehabilitation work that needs to be accomplished?**

The priorities of rehabilitation work typically focuses on stabilizing soil; reducing sedimentation and debris movement; and mitigating significant threats to health, safety, life, property and downstream values.

2. **Who is likely to serve on a BAER team?**

BAER teams are led by the US Forest Service and are staffed by trained professionals: hydrologists, soil scientists, engineers, biologists, vegetation specialists, archeologists, and others, who rapidly evaluate a burned area and prescribe emergency stabilization treatments.

3. **What specific technical assistance does the NRCS provide to the BAER team assessments?**

- Access to preexisting relationships with private landowners and local government entities which facilitates the assessment process;
- Exceptional knowledge of private land conservation objectives and the treatment methods that will accomplish them;
- Leadership and skill in conducting resource assessment and evaluation processes on non federal lands;
- Soils, botany, biology, engineering, hydrology, GIS, etc. skills as needed to compliment skills of other BAER team members; and
- Knowledge and ability to implement USDA financial assistance programs applicable for rehabilitation of non federal lands.

4. **What is the Emergency Watershed Protection Program?**

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) was set up by Congress to respond to emergencies created by natural disasters. It is designed to relieve imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences. The purpose of EWP is to help groups of people with a common problem. It is generally not an individual assistance program. All projects undertaken must be sponsored by a political subdivision of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, or conservation district. The United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service is responsible for administering the program.

**5. What kind of work can be done after wildfire or flood?**

EWP work is not limited to any one set of prescribed measures. A case by case investigation of the needed work is made by NRCS. EWP work can include:

- removing debris from stream channels
- road culverts and bridges
- reshaping and protecting eroded banks
- correcting damaged drainage facilities
- repairing levees and structures
- reseeding damaged areas
- purchasing floodplain easements.
- mulching (aerial and ground application)
- slash spreading
- soil scarification
- erosion barriers (felled logs, fiber rolls, silt fencing, sandbags)
- grade stabilizers and checkdams (logs, rock, fiber roll, strawbales)
- channel and diversion dikes
- in-channel tree felling
- debris & sediment basins
- bank armoring, and
- culvert and drainage modifications

**6. Is financial assistance available through EWP?**

NRCS may bear up to 75 percent of the construction cost of emergency measures or up to 90 percent in limited resource areas. The remaining cost-share must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

**7. What are the criteria for assistance?**

All EWP work must reduce threats to life and property. Furthermore, it must be economically and environmentally defensible and sound from an engineering standpoint. EWP work must yield benefits to more than one person. All work must represent the least expensive alternative.

**8. Who is eligible?**

**Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance but MUST be represented by a project sponsor.** The project sponsor must be a public agency of state, county, or city government, or a special district or tribal government.

**9. What does the sponsor have to do?**

Sponsors are responsible for providing land rights to do repair work and securing the necessary permits. Sponsors are also responsible for furnishing the local construction cost share and for accomplishing the installation of work. Contributions may be in the form of cash, in-kind services such as labor or equipment, or a combination of cash and in-kind services.

**10. What can't EWP do?**

EWP funds cannot be used to solve problems that existed before the disaster or to improve the level of protection above that which existed prior to the disaster. EWP cannot fund operation and maintenance work, or repair private or public transportation facilities or utilities. EWP work cannot adversely affect downstream water rights, and EWP funds cannot be used to install measures not essential to the reduction of hazards. In addition, EWP funds cannot be used to perform work on measures installed by another federal agency.

**11. How do I get assistance?**

If you feel your area has suffered severe damage and may qualify under the EWP program, you are encouraged to contact your NRCS field office located in the USDA service center that services your county.