

Potential Impacts to Water Quality from the Cave Canyon Fire

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The 2012 fire season in Idaho captured the public's attention as smoke filled the air and headlines read "Raging Wildfire Threatens Homes and Brings Destruction". Wildfire effects to vegetation, soils, and runoff have been well documented and can cause increased runoff and erosion, with potentially devastating effects on water quality and other downstream resources. However, there is typically more to the story once the flames are extinguished. A Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team from the Sawtooth National Forest (SNF) assessed the 88,909 acre lightning caused Cave Canyon fire in August 2012. While a large portion of the fire burned vegetation at high and moderate intensities, the team found that only 1% of the total area burned at high severity resulting in minor risks to hill-slope erosion. Other potential impacts to water quality from ash and increased solar radiation remained. The team prescribed treatments to minimize risks to water quality and other resources and the SNF is currently implementing a comprehensive package of restoration treatments. During this presentation fire effects, post-fire risks, and restoration treatments will be discussed.