MEMORANDUM

Date: June 16, 2020

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
    Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
    County Administrator

Re: Bighorn Fire

The Bighorn Fire began on June 5th, 2020 due to lightning from a thunderstorm and is being managed by the Southwest Area Type 1 Incident Management Team, and federal agencies including the Coronado National Forest. As of today, the fire is 14,686 acres and 30% contained. For your information, I have attached a map of the current fire area (Attachment 1). The County is involved, but our involvement has been limited to assisting federal agencies in their firefighting operations or supporting the needs of our community evacuating from their homes. Assistant County Administrator John Voorhees has been providing daily updates regarding fire activity.

Our Office of Emergency Management and Sheriff’s Department are also helping limit access to public streets, highways and former natural recreational sites. In addition, the Sheriff’s Department has also conducted activities related to the evacuation of occupied structures thought to be in fire danger and during periods of evacuation, the Sheriff also provides increased patrols to prevent vandalism and theft.

The Office of Emergency Management coordinates communications and other activities necessary to support federal agencies, including operation of our emergency notification system, Everbridge, which is used to electronically notify residents of fire advisories and evacuation orders. They also coordinated with the Red Cross to establish an Evacuation Center at Canyon Del Oro High School.

The Pima County agencies who supported our community during the recent evacuations were Communications (Bighorn Fire webpage and social media monitoring); Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation (large animal shelter); Animal Control Center (small animal shelter); Health Department (health monitoring and communication with care facilities in the impacted zones); and Environmental Quality (air monitoring).

Today, a “GO” evacuation message went out to most of the residents of Summerhaven. Additional county departments that may play a support role or the fire could impact infrastructure include Wastewater Reclamation, Transportation, and PCWIN.

The Regional Flood Control District (RFCD) has also been involved in fire assessment, particularly as it relates to how the fire may damage watersheds that have burned and now pose possible flood hazards. This is particularly important with the upcoming Monsoon
season as watersheds that have been consumed by fire drain from the Catalina Mountains into surrounding occupied urban areas. The attached June 15, 2020 memorandum identifies the activities of the RFCD. (Attachment 2)

A Fire Management Assistance Grant was declared for the Bighorn Fire. This Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) program provides reimbursement of costs associated with the fire for local agencies. Grants Management Innovation will coordinate all reimbursement requests that will be forwarded to FEMA.

Please contact my office if you have any questions on this subject.

CHH/anc

Attachments

c: Jan Lesher, Chief Deputy County Administrator
    Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
    John Voorhees, Assistant County Administrator
    Jeff Guthrie, Director, Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
    Shane Clark, Operations Manager, Office Emergency Management and Homeland Security
    Suzanne Shields, Director, Regional Flood Control District
Progression
Bighorn
AZ-CNFR-413
6/16/2020 Day

15,805 acres at 6/15/2020 2230

Scale: 1:22,000

Date
- 2020-06-07
- 2020-06-08
- 2020-06-09
- 2020-06-10
- 2020-06-11
- 2020-06-12
- 2020-06-13
- 2020-06-14
- 2020-06-15

Fire Progression - Growth Acres by Date

2020-06-07: 1,795
2020-06-08: 840
2020-06-09: 730
2020-06-10: 1,734
2020-06-11: 2,088
2020-06-12: 3,662
2020-06-13: 2,332
2020-06-14: 1,492
2020-06-15: 1,465
TO:        C. H. Huckelberry  
            County Administrator
FROM:     Suzanne Shields, P.E.  
            Director

SUBJECT:   Post Big Horn Fire Plan

The Pima County Regional Flood Control District (District) has prepared a plan to assess the impact of the Big Horn Fire on the Santa Catalina watersheds and potential increased flood risk to downstream areas in Catalina, Oro Valley and along the Catalina Foothills watercourses. The District is contracting with JE Fuller to update hydrologic models of these watersheds, which will be based on burn intensity and fire extent. We are working with the US Forest Service (USFS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to gather the necessary data for these models as well as to develop outreach to the public. The post-fire flood risk information will be used by our ALERT staff, Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the first responders and will be used to identify areas for enhanced public outreach.

POST-FIRE HYDROLOGIC ASSESSMENT

Using fire damage/intensity assessments, working with USFS’s Burn Assessment Emergency Response (BAER) teams, the District will update existing hydrologic and hydraulic maps based on the BAER information. The BAER team also often come up with storm runoff discharge values after fires using a model called “Wildcat.” The post-fire assessment will use burn severity maps to:

- Identify post-fire watershed priorities (which watersheds are the most critical);
- Acquire floodplain hydrology and hydraulic models for fire damaged watersheds;
- Assess percentage increase in discharge associated with post-fire hydrology;
- Identify at risk structures using existing models (when practicable) and create additional modeling as needed;
- Identify at-risk access and at-risk public infrastructure;
- Assess the District’s flood warning ALERT capabilities and make recommendations for additional gages if and where necessary;
- Work ALERT and OEM to develop response strategies including use the of emergencyalerts.pima.gov/ to provide warnings and information;
- Identify mitigation strategies;
- Prepare exhibits as necessary for public communication; and
- Identify future floodplain mapping needs as necessary.

FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

The District is looking at what assistance may be available NRCS’s Emergency Watershed Protection Program, which can provide assistance for erosion control and flood mitigation on private land post
wildfires. FEMA also can provide immediate flood insurance coverage for structures after a severe fire. When a wildfire occurs on federal lands, the typical 30-day wait period for insurance policies to become effective is waived and the effective date is the date of purchase as long as the policy was acquired within 60 days after fire containment. As we learn more about these assistance programs and flood and erosion impacts from the fire, the District will develop a public information program for first responders, residents and businesses.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I will be providing you with information on our assessments and any federal or state assistance programs.

SS/tj

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator – Public Works
Jan Lesher, Deputy County Administrator – Community and Economic Development
John Voorhees, Assistant County Administrator – County Administrator’s Office
Jeff Guthrie, Director – Office of Emergency Management
Eric Shepp, P.E., Deputy Director – Regional Flood Control District
Andy Dinauer, P.E., Deputy Director – Regional Flood Control District