

**Interagency BAER-Emergency Stabilization & Rehabilitation Teams  
BURNED• AREA• EMERGENCY• RESPONSE• (BAER)**



**Australia Support 2009**

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**STATUS UPDATE: February 18, 2009**

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**INTERAGENCY BAER TEAMS DEPLOYED TO AUSTRALIA**  
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Two United States (US) Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams arrived in Australia on Sunday, February 15, 2009, and were greeted by the U.S. Consulate General, Michael Thurston, at the Melbourne International Airport. Both teams have been requested by the Australian government to assist, supplement and support Victoria State agencies in their bushfire recovery efforts ([www.nifc.gov/fire\\_info/news/nr\\_Australia\\_Assistance020909.pdf](http://www.nifc.gov/fire_info/news/nr_Australia_Assistance020909.pdf)).

The US BAER emergency stabilization-rehabilitation teams are primarily working with:

- Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) ([www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/index.htm](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/index.htm))
- Country Fire Authority (CFA) ([www.cfa.vic.gov.au/](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/))
- Parks Victoria (PV) ([www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/))

The main mission of the BAER teams is to work with DSE, CFA, and PV to assess public and private lands and analyze post-fire effects that may threaten assets-at-risk from potential floods, erosion, and slips. They are also sharing and exchanging methodology and procedures.

Each team is made up of a variety of specialists such as soil scientists, hydrologists, geologists, biologists, geographic information system specialists, archeologist, botanist, silviculturist, research engineer, and civil engineer. The BAER teams are very experienced specialists that are highly effective in conducting rapid assessments and analyses.

The two BAER teams are comprised of US Department of Interior (DOI) and US Department of Agriculture (USDA) interagency specialists from the following federal bureaus:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Fish and Wildlife Service (F&WS)
- National Park Service (NPS)
- Forest Service (USFS)

The leaders of the team are Erv Gasser (NPS) and Carolyn Napper (USFS). Both are highly experienced in burned area emergency stabilization and rehabilitation efforts and have led



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BAER teams for complex fires in southern California in 2003 and 2007. Carolyn also led US teams in Greece in 2007.

Both BAER teams spent all day on Monday, February 16, in Melbourne receiving orientation and training specific to Australian firefighting techniques and concerns. Topics included a briefing on fire behavior in Australian fuel types, fire weather patterns, regulations specific to both Victoria State firefighting and land management, and fireline safety.

On Tuesday, February 17, both BAER teams were deployed to different Victoria State bushfires to begin their fire rehabilitation assessments.

The Napper BAER Team arrived in the town of Traralgon which is within the Gippsland region - northeast of Melbourne. The team received a briefing on the current fire situation for the Churchill-Jeeraloang Complex of fires and safety concerns by the Incident Controller (Robert Ellis), Deputy IC (Shane Mynard), and the Gippsland Regional DSE Manager (Laurie Jeremiah). The team spent the rest of the afternoon working with the local DSE, CFA, and PV officials discussing potential values-at-risk within the burned fire areas and fire suppression rehabilitation needs.

Napper BAER Team members accompanied Andrea Brumley (Rescue Operations Officer) to the Morwell Animal Clinic. At the Morwell Animal Clinic, we met with members of BADGAR, a highly skilled volunteer wildlife rescue and protection group who were delivering two injured koalas for veterinary medical care. The koalas had been rescued from the Churchill Fire and were suffering from burns to their feet and dehydration. The veterinarian and his assistants administered IV fluids and cleaned and dressed the koalas' burns. Subsequent to treatment, the animals were transported to a rescue facility to recuperate. The members of BADGAR and the veterinarian perform wildlife rescue as a volunteer service, providing a remarkable model of motivation, expertise organization ([www.wrap.org.au](http://www.wrap.org.au)).

Several BAER team members attended a community meeting at Longwarry held by the agencies working on the Bunyip Ridge fire which the Napper BAER team will begin their assessment on Friday, February 20. BAER Team Leader Carolyn Napper gave a short presentation on objectives of post-fire assessments, the type of specialists working on the BAER team and what to expect from the team and their assessments.

On Wednesday, February 18, the Napper BAER team divided into two groups and were accompanied to the burned fire areas by local field reps from CFA (Peter Barr) and Parks



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Victoria (Craig Campbell) to assess suppression and post fire concerns (such as fire trail closure, impacts to irrigation ditches, potential for accelerated erosion, and loss of water control) on the Delburn and Churchill Complex fires.

BAER team PIO Cathleen Thompson remained at the IMT's command post with IMT Media Liaison Alex Konrad and provided interviews and discussions about the BAER team's mission to 1) local TV journalist (Emma Meggs, WIN News – Channel 9, [www.wintv.com.au/index\\_new.php?regid=12](http://www.wintv.com.au/index_new.php?regid=12)); 2) Warren Truss (leader of the national minor party, [www.warrentruss.com/](http://www.warrentruss.com/)); and 3) Russell Northe (local federal member of the parliament, [www.russellnorthe.com.au/](http://www.russellnorthe.com.au/)).

Both BAER teams are working with USGS Earth Resources Observation and Science Center (EROS) and Forest Service Remote Sensing Applications Center (RSAC) to provide Burned Area Reflectance Classification (BARC) maps which assist the BAER teams with developing soil burn severity map products.

On Saturday, February 21, the U.S. Ambassador's Chargé D'Affaires, Dan Clune, will be traveling to the bushfire burned areas near the Gippsland region where he is scheduled to visit with the Napper BAER team.

To support Victorians who lost loved ones and had their homes and communities devastated by the bushfires, the Australian and Victorian governments have announced that Sunday, February 22, will be a National Day of Mourning. Many communities around Victoria State will be observing that day with local memorial services.

The Gasser BAER Team arrived at the Beechworth-Library Road Fire on Tuesday, February 17. An initial briefing was conducted by Parks Victoria and Department of Sustainability and Environment local officials.

On February 18, an additional briefing was held with specialists from DSE and PV prior to the Gasser BAER team initiating an aerial and ground assessment. Following the briefing, the team's archeologist, Chuck James, went to the field with DSE's Indigenous Facilitator (Donna Mitsch), to stabilize a rock art site that had been damaged during suppression operations. The team's watershed group is working with members of the North East Catchment Management Authority (Adrian Cioli and Natalie Martin). The team's biodiversity group is working with DSE (Sue Berwick). DSE (Craig Hamilton) is assisting the team with locating GIS data layers that are necessary for their analysis.



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Collie Grange with ABC Radio coordinated with Team Leader Erv Gasser for an interview talking about the team's objectives and work with the local Victoria State agencies on its post-fire assessments.

Issues identified by the Gasser BAER team so far include: rock art damage, water catchments, potential ash/sediment entering water systems, soil burn severity, vegetation mortality, threatened species habitat, suppression impacts, and invasive species.

The Gasser BAER team is coordinating with its Victoria State counterparts to collect the following GIS data layers needed to conduct its analysis: fire perimeter, fire history, ownership, vegetation, watersheds, bioregions, catchment zones, and infrastructure have been downloaded. The BAER team will continue field assessments on Thursday, February 19, and will begin report writing on Friday, February 20, and will report-out to DSE and PV on Monday, February 23.

Members of the Gasser BAER team include: Erv Gasser, NPS (Team Leader); Gavin Lovell, BLM (Assistant Team Leader); Nora Caplette, BLM; Mike Dolan, BLM; Richard Easterbrook, NPS; Kenneth Griggs, F&WS; Judy Hallisey, USFS; Chuck James, BIA; Lisa Jameson, NPS; Richard Pyzik, USFS; William Sims, BIA; and Fred VonBonin, BIA.

Members of the Napper BAER team include: Carolyn Napper, USFS (Team Leader); Todd Ellsworth, USFS (Assistant Team Leader); Bob Davidson, USFS; Michael Kellett, USFS; Tom Koler, USFS; Greg Napper, USFS; Jason Pyron, USFS; Pete Robichaud, USFS; Jim Schmitt, USFS; Liz Schnackenberg, USFS; Ed Snook, USFS; and Dave Young, USFS.

Both US BAER teams are supported by Rich Schwab, NPS (BAER Team Field Liaison) and Cathleen Thompson, USFS (BAER Team Information Officer).

