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## **Emergency Assessment of Debris-Flow Hazards from Basins Burned by the Cedar and Paradise Fires of 2003, Southern California**

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### **ABSTRACT**

These maps present preliminary assessments of the probability of debris-flow activity and estimates of peak discharges that can potentially be generated by debris flows issuing from basins burned by the Cedar and Paradise Fires of October 2003 in southern California in response to 25-year, 10-year, and 2-year recurrence, 1-hour duration rain storms. The probability maps are based on the application of a logistic multiple regression model that describes the percent chance of debris-flow production from an individual basin as a function of burned extent, soil properties, basin gradients, and storm rainfall. The peak-discharge maps are based on application of a multiple-regression model that can be used to estimate debris-flow peak discharge at a basin outlet as a function of basin gradient, burn extent, and storm rainfall. Probabilities of debris-flow occurrence for the Cedar Fire range between 0 and 98% and estimates of debris-flow peak discharges range between 893 and 5,987 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (25 to 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s). Basins burned by the Paradise Fire show probabilities for debris-flow occurrence between 2 and 98%, and peak discharge estimates between 1,814 and 5,980 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (51 and 169 m<sup>3</sup>/s). These maps are intended to identify those basins that are most prone to the largest debris-flow events and provide information timing and routes.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The objective of this paper is to present a preliminary emergency assessment of the potential for debris-flow generation from basins burned by the Cedar and Paradise Fires in southern California for given rainfall events (Fig. 1). The assessments are intended to identify those basins most likely to produce debris flows, and to estimate the magnitude, in terms of peak discharge, of the possible debris-flow response at the outlets of the basins. Identification of potential debris-flow hazards from burned drainage basins is necessary to make effective and appropriate mitigation decisions, and can aid in decisions about evacuation timing and routes.

## **Fire-Related Debris-Flow Hazards**

Wildfire can have profound effects on a watershed. Consumption of the rainfall-intercepting canopy and of the soil-mantling litter and duff, intensive drying of the soil, combustion of soil-binding organic matter, and the enhancement or formation of water repellent soils can result in decreased rainfall infiltration into the soil and subsequent significantly increased overland flow and runoff in channels. Removal of obstructions to flow (e.g., live and downed timber, plant stems, etc.) by wildfire can enhance the erosive power of overland flow, resulting in accelerated stripping of material from hillslopes. Increased runoff can also erode significant volumes of material from channels. The net result of rainfall on burned basins is often the transport and deposition of large volumes of sediment, both within and down-channel from the burned area.

Debris flows are among the most hazardous consequences of rainfall on burned hillslopes. Debris flows pose a hazard distinct from other sediment-laden flows because of their unique destructive power. They can occur with little warning, can exert great impulsive loads on objects in their paths, and even small debris flows can strip vegetation, block drainageways, damage structures, and endanger human life. For example, record-breaking winter storms in 1969 triggered debris flows from steep basins burned the previous summer above the city of Glendora, California (Scott, 1971). More than one million cubic meters of rock, mud, and debris came racing downhill, and at least 175 homes were either completely destroyed or damaged by these events. Damage from debris flows and associated flooding totaled \$2,500,000 in the Glendora area in 1969.

In studies of debris-flow processes throughout the western U.S. and in southern California, Cannon (2000, 2001) demonstrated that the great majority of fire-related debris flows initiate through a process of progressive bulking of storm runoff with sediment eroded from both hillslopes and channels. Although some infiltration-triggered landsliding can occasionally occur in burned basins, and generally in response to prolonged rainfall events, these failures generally contribute a small proportion to the total volume of material transported from the basin (Cannon et al., 2001; Scott, 1971). This finding points to the relative importance of runoff-dominated, rather than infiltration-dominated, processes of debris-flow initiation in recently burned basins, and indicates that methodologies developed to map landslide potential for unburned basins are generally not appropriate for recently burned areas. As an alternative, this finding suggests that the relations traditionally defined between peak discharges of floods and basin characteristics may be useful in predicting the magnitude of potential debris-flow response from burned basins.

## **APPROACH AND METHODS**

In a study of the erosional response of recently burned basins throughout the western U.S., including southern California, Cannon (2000, 2001) found that not all basins produce debris flows; most burned watersheds respond to even heavy rainfall events by sediment-laden flooding. However, debris flows are potentially the most destructive end of the post-fire runoff response spectrum. Analysis of data collected from 398 burned basins from 15 fires throughout the inter-mountain west revealed that the probability of a given basin to produce debris flows can be readily identified by a combination of geologic, soil, basin morphology, burn severity, and rainfall conditions. Furthermore, because debris-flow kinematics are significantly distinct from those of streamflow (Iverson, 1997), we have taken the approach of developing predictive relations that are specific to debris flow. Using data collected from debris-flow-producing basins throughout the western U.S., including southern California (Bigio and Cannon, 2001), we developed an empirical relation that can be used to obtain estimates of debris-flow peak magnitudes as a function of the area of the basin burned, storm rainfall conditions, and basin gradients.

In this assessment, we use these recently developed models to predict which basins might produce fire-related debris flows, and how big these events might be. The results obtained in this assessment can be used to identify those watersheds that are most prone to the largest debris-flow events. Note that the models used for the generation of these maps are new and have not been thoroughly tested and reviewed. However, in light of the large extent of the Cedar and Paradise Fires and of the current emergency situation, this method presents a reasonable preliminary approach to evaluate hazards across a large geographic area.

## Debris-flow probability model

A logistic multivariate statistical model developed using data measured from post-wildfire debris flows is used to define the probability of debris-flow occurrence from basins burned by the Cedar and Paradise Fires. The database used in the development of the model consists of a number of variables that describe basin gradient, burn severity, geologic materials, soil properties, and storm rainfall conditions from 398 basins located in 15 recent fires throughout the western U.S. that were characterized either as having produced debris flows, or not. Because the dependent variable, debris-flow occurrence, is binomial (i.e., debris flows were produced, or not), we used a logistic regression approach for analysis. Where linear regression returns a continuous value for the dependent variable, logistic regression returns the probability of a positive binomial outcome (in this case, debris-flow occurrence) (Hosmer and Lemeshow, 2000; Griffiths et al., 1996).

Field observations of deposits made within 1 week of a runoff response were used to determine if a basin produced debris flows or not. Debris-flow deposits were identified as those consisting of poorly-sorted, unstratified materials showing either matrix support of the larger clasts, or a prevalent muddy coating on large materials (Cannon, 2001; Meyer and Wells, 1997).

Because we did not know which measures would best determine debris-flow probability, we evaluated a number of different measures for each of the independent variables to be used in the logistic regression. Six possible measures of basin gradient were compiled using either 30-m or 10-m DEMs, depending on availability. These include:

- the average gradient,
- average gradient multiplied by basin area,
- average gradient divided by basin area,
- percentage of basin area with slopes greater than or equal to 30 percent,
- percentage of basin area with slopes greater than or equal to 50 percent, and
- basin ruggedness (the change in basin elevation divided by the square root of the basin area (Melton, 1965).

Basin aspect was quantified from either 10- or 30-m DEMs as degrees from the north. Burn severity for each basin was characterized using maps of burn severity generated by either the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Team using a number of different techniques, or from the Normalized Burn Ratio (NBR), as determined from Landsat Thematic Mapper data (Key and Benson, 2000). The maps of burn severity are considered to reflect the effects of the fire on soil conditions and the potential hydrologic response, and are a representation of a combination of the condition of the residual ground cover, soil erodibility, and degree of fire-induced water repellency. We evaluated the effects of nine measures of burn severity, including:

- percentage of the basin area burned at low severity,
- percentage of the basin area burned at moderate severity,
- percentage of the basin area burned at high severity,
- percentage of the basin area burned at high and moderate severities,
- percentage of the burned area of each basin burned at low severity,
- percentage of the burned area of each basin burned at moderate severity,
- percentage of the burned area of each basin burned at high severity,
- percentage of the burned area of each basin burned at high and moderate severities,
- percentage of basin area burned at high, moderate, and low severities.

Soil properties for each basin were characterized using measures of the grain-size distributions of samples of burned surficial soils collected within the basins (Inman, 1952), and the parameters for unburned soils included in the STATSGO soils database (Schwartz and Alexander, 1995). The 1:250,000-scale STATSGO compilation was used to insure that similar measures of all parameters were available for each fire in the database.

The soil properties evaluated include:

- mean particle size,
- median particle size,
- sorting of the grain-size distribution, and
- skewness of grain-size distribution,
- percent clay content,
- available water capacity,
- permeability,
- erodibility,
- percent organic matter,
- soil thickness,
- infiltration capacity,
- drainage,
- liquid limit, and
- hydric capacity.

The most extensive rock type underlying each basin was classified as sedimentary, plutonic, metamorphic, or volcanic. The characteristics of storms that affected the monitored basins were determined from tipping-bucket rain gages located within 2 km of each basin. For each storm to impact a monitored basin, we compiled the

- total storm rainfall,
- storm duration,
- average storm rainfall intensity,
- peak 10-minute rainfall,
- peak 15-minute rainfall,
- peak 30-minute rainfall, and
- peak 60-minute rainfall.

A series of univariate and multiple logistic regression analyses were used to identify those parameters which best determine debris-flow probability, and to build a robust statistical model (Hosmer and Lemeshow, 1989). All possible groupings of independent variables were evaluated to determine which combination produced the most effective model. The models were built by sequentially adding variables to the analysis and evaluating the resulting test statistics by comparing partial-likelihood ratios calculated before and after addition of that variable (Helsel and Hirsch, 2002). Overall model validity and accuracy were determined by evaluating the log-likelihood ratio, McFadden's rho-squared, p-values calculated for each independent variable, and the percentage of correct responses (M. Rupert, written communication, 2003).

The statistical analyses found that the probability of debris-flow occurrence (P) from an individual basin can best be estimated as a function of:

- percentage of the burned area in each basin burned at high and moderate severities (% Burn),
- sorting of the grain-size distribution of the burned soil (Sorting),
- percentage of soil organic matter (%Organics)
- soil permeability (Permeability)
- soil drainage (Drainage), and
- percentage of the basin with slopes greater than or equal to 30% (%GE30%)
- average storm rainfall intensity (I, in mm/hr)

These variables were used to develop a logistic multivariate statistical model of the form

$$P = e^x / (1 + e^x),$$

where

$$x = -29.693 + 10.697(\% \text{ Burn}) - 9.875(\text{Sorting}) + 0.208(I) + 5.729(\% \text{ Organics}) - 0.957(\text{Permeability}) + 9.351(\text{Drainage}) + 2.864(\% \text{ GE30\%}) - 8.335(\% \text{ Burn} * \% \text{ Organics}) + 4.669(\text{Sorting} * \text{Drainage}) - 0.174(\% \text{ GE30\%} * I).$$

The McFadden's rho of 0.397 for this model, coupled with the additional tests of model quality, indicates that this is a robust model. Values of McFadden's rho between 0.20 and 0.40 are considered to indicate good results (Hosmer and Lemeshow, 2000). Graphical analyses indicate no apparent correlations between the soil properties included in the model. The additional measures of gradient, aspect, burned extent, soil properties and geologic materials produced significantly less satisfactory models. This model, when incorporated into a Geographical Information System (GIS), can be used to estimate the probability of post-fire debris-flow activity from individual drainage basins.

### Debris-flow peak-discharge model

A multiple-regression model developed using data measured from post-wildfire debris flows is used to define the range of peak discharges that can potentially be generated from the basins burned by the Cedar and Paradise Fires. The data used in the development of the model consists of measurements from 62 recently burned, and debris-flow-producing, basins located throughout the western U.S. for which estimates of debris-flow peak discharge had been obtained (Bigio and Cannon, 2001). The database is a compilation of information both from the published literature and our own monitoring efforts. Peak-discharge estimates used in the analysis were calculated based on either the assumption of critical flow (O'Connor et al., 2001), or from estimates of velocity obtained from measurements of banking flow around curves (Johnson and Rodine, 1984) coupled with measures of the cross-sectional area of conveyance reaches of channels.

The regression model consists of a physical representation of peak discharge at the basin outlet ( $Q_p$ ) as a function of basin gradient, burned extent, and storm rainfall. We considered the effects on  $Q_p$  of three possible measures of gradient—the average basin gradient (in percent), and the percentage of slopes within a basin greater than or equal to 30%, and the percentage of slopes within a basin greater than or equal to 50% (determined from either 10- or 30-m DEMs). We also evaluated the effects of two measures of burned extent—the total area burned (in  $m^2$ ), and the area burned at high severity (in  $m^2$ ). Burn severity for each basin included in the database was characterized using information reported in the literature, or maps of burn severity generated by either the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Team, or the Normalized Burn Ratio (NBR), as described above.

A series of statistical analyses was used to determine those factors that most strongly affect debris-flow peak discharges, and to build the most robust regression model possible. All possible combinations of independent variables were evaluated to determine which combination produced the most effective model. We used a combination of statistical measures including Mallows'  $C_p$ , adjusted  $R^2$ , the variance inflation factor, and the prediction error of the sum of squares to assess the quality of each model (Helsel and Hirsch, 2002). For a model to be accepted, we also tested for adherence to the assumptions of linearity, constant variance, and normally distributed residuals (Helsel and Hirsch, 2002).

We found that the peak discharge of debris flows ( $Q_p$ , in  $m^3/s$ ) issuing from the outlet of recently-burned basins can be estimated as a function of:

- average basin gradient (AvgSlope, in percent),
- the area of the basin burned at all severities ( $A_b$ , in  $m^2$ ), and
- the average storm-rainfall intensity ( $I$ , in mm/hr).

These variables form the basis of a multi-variate statistical model of the form

$$Q_p = -171 + 0.552(\text{AvgSlope}) + 28.4(\log A_b) + 3.6(I).$$

The adjusted  $R^2$  of this model of 0.67, coupled with additional tests of model quality, indicates that this result is the best possible model, given the available data. Graphical analyses indicate no apparent correlation between average basin gradient and burned area. The additional measures of gradient and burned extent considered here produced less satisfactory models. This model, when incorporated into a Geographical Information System (GIS), can be used to estimate the peak discharge of post-fire debris flows at the outlets of individual drainage basins.

## Mapping debris-flow probability and peak discharge

As the first step in this assessment, the perimeters of 353 basins burned by the Cedar Fire, and 80 basins burned by the Paradise Fire were delineated. Basin outlets were located using a shaded relief image from a 30-m DEM overlain by a detailed stream network generated using Arc Hydro©. Basin outlets were positioned at breaks in slope between mountain fronts and valleys, or, if present, at road crossings or upslope from development. Using the ranges of data in the database that were used to derive the statistical models, we focused on basins between 0.04 mi<sup>2</sup> (0.1 km<sup>2</sup>) and 10 mi<sup>2</sup> (25 km<sup>2</sup>) in area. Basins larger than 10 mi<sup>2</sup> (25 km<sup>2</sup>) were sub-divided into tributaries to the main channel. Although debris flows may be generated in the lower order drainages of such basins, they are generally not of sufficient size or energy to travel the entire length of the basin. Basins larger in area than 10 mi<sup>2</sup> (25 km<sup>2</sup>) with negligible potential impact on facilities and structures were not included. For each basin, we then compiled values for each of the input variables for the two models. Basin area and measures of gradients were obtained from 30-m DEMs, the basin areas burned at different severities were characterized from the watershed response map developed by the BAER Team, and soil organic matter, permeability and drainage were obtained from the STATSGO database (Schwartz and Alexander, 1995). If more than one value for any one parameter is present in a basin, we calculated a single spatially-weighted value for that parameter. The time available to conduct this emergency assessment did not allow for the collection and analysis of samples of burned surficial soils. As an alternative, we used 1:250,000-scale geologic mapping of the area (State of California, 1969) as a surrogate for soils, and substituted median values of known measures of sorting of the grain-size distribution of burned soils for each primary rock type present in each basin.

The probability of debris flow and estimates of debris-flow peak discharge for the 25-year, 10-year and 2-year recurrence, 1-hour-duration storms were calculated using the logistic multivariate regression model for debris-flow probability and the multivariate statistical model for debris-flow peak discharge. Storm rainfall values input into the models were obtained from maps of rainfall depth-duration relations generated using data from NOAA Atlas 14 (Bonnin et al., 2003) as part of the BAER Team effort (M. Parenti, written commun. 2003). Although there is some variability in storm-rainfall characteristics across the burned areas, the present versions of the models allow for only a single storm input. We thus identified a representative average storm rainfall value as that located near the center of the fires. The values used in the analyses are shown in Table 1. The calculated values of debris-flow probability and peak discharge were proportioned into classes, and the class value for both probability and discharge were attributed to each basin. The basin class values are presented for each basin in map form as Map 1A and B, Map 2A and B, and Map 3A and B.

**Table 1. Storm rainfall values used in assessments.**

25-year, 1-hour storm (in.)	10-year, 1-hour storm (in.)	2-year, 1-hour storm (in.)
1.30	1.00	0.67

## Use and Limitations of the Maps

These maps provide estimates of the probability of debris-flow occurrence and the ranges of debris-flow peak discharges that can potentially issue from the outlets of basins burned by the Cedar and Paradise Fires in response to the 2-year, 10-year, and 25-year 1-hour storms. The maps are intended to identify those basins most likely to produce debris flows, and to provide estimates of the possible magnitude, in terms of peak discharge, of the debris-flow response at the outlets of basins. This information can be used to prioritize mitigation efforts, to

aid in the design of mitigation structures, and to guide decisions for evacuation, shelter, and escape routes in the event that storms of similar magnitude to those evaluated here are forecast for the area.

The potential for debris-flow activity decreases with time and the concurrent revegetation and stabilization of hillslopes. A compilation of information on post-fire runoff events reported in the literature from throughout the western U.S. indicates that most debris-flow activity occurs within about 2 years following a fire (Bigio and Cannon, 2001). We thus conservatively expect that the maps presented here may be applicable for approximately 3 years after the fires for the storm conditions considered here. Further, the assessments presented here are specific to post-fire debris flows; significant hazards from flash flooding can remain for many years after a fire.

The methods used to derive the probability and peak discharge estimates are new and have not been thoroughly tested and reviewed. However, in light of the large extent of the Cedar and Paradise Fires and of the current emergency situation, this method presents a reasonable approach to preliminarily evaluate debris-flow hazards across a large geographic area. A significant advantage to this approach is that it is based on analysis of data specifically from post-wildfire debris-flow events, rather than on estimates of flood runoff with assumed sediment-bulking factors.

In this approach, we considered peak discharge as the measure of the magnitude of the potential debris-flow hazards; debris-flow hazards can also be characterized by measures of potential volumes emanating from basin outlets. Measures of volume are of particular use in evaluating the effectiveness of debris basins. We conducted analyses similar to those described above using measures of debris-flow volume as the dependent variable. However, it was not possible to develop a robust, statistically significant model with the available dataset. Hopefully, data collected in the following winters will allow for the definition of such a relationship.

And last, the parameters included in the models are considered to be possible first-order effects that can be rapidly evaluated immediately after a fire. Other conditions than those used in the model may certainly affect debris-flow occurrence and peak discharge from recently burned basins in southern California. For example, an abundance of dry-ravel material in a specific channel may certainly affect peak discharges, and the frequently occurring fire-flood sequence that characterizes southern California basins may similarly limit material availability (e.g., Spittler, 1995). Data necessary to evaluate these effects are not currently available to account for their effects in this approach.

## RESULTS

### **Cedar Fire—25-year, 1-hour storm of 1.30 inches (33.0 mm)**

Of the 353 basins evaluated in this assessment, 167 were identified as having probabilities greater than 67% that debris-flows will occur in response to the 25-year, 1-hour rainstorm (Map 1A). These include Poway Creek and three adjacent unnamed basins on the northwest edge of the fire, most of the tributaries to San Vicente Creek above, adjacent to, and below San Vicente Reservoir; tributaries to Barona Creek; many of the tributaries to the San Diego River, including Chocolate Canyon, Puetz Valley, and basins that drain into El Capitan Reservoir; most of the tributaries to Conejos and King Creeks; seven of the tributaries to Boulder Creek; six tributaries to Cedar Creek; a tributary to the Sweetwater River; Viejas Creek; Harbison Canyon; and six additional unnamed basins within the southern extension of the fire. In response to a 25-year, 1-hour storm, debris-flow peak discharges between 3,001 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (85 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 1B).

Numerous basins show probabilities of debris-flow occurrence between 33 and 67%, still an appreciable hazard (Map 1A). These include tributaries to Sycamore Canyon, San Vicente and Barona Creeks; tributaries to the San Diego River below, along, and above El Capitan Reservoir; tributaries to Cedar and Boulder Creeks; tributaries to Conejos and King Creeks; tributaries to the Sweetwater River; two tributaries to Pine Valley Creek; and basins in the southern extension of the fire, including Forester Creek. Debris-flow peak discharges between 3,001 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (85 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are also estimated for these basins (Map 1B).

### **Cedar Fire—10-year, 1-hour storm of 1.00 inches (25.4 mm)**

In response to a 10-year, 1-hour storm, a probability of debris-flow occurrence greater than 67% is identified for the following basins within the Cedar Fire (Map 2A): tributaries to San Vicente and Barona Creeks; tributaries to the San Diego River below, along, and above El Capitan Reservoir; tributaries to Boulder Creek; and most of the tributaries to Conejos and King Creeks. Debris flows with peak discharges between 1,501 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (43 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 2B).

In response to this storm, numerous basins show probabilities of debris-flow occurrence between 33 and 67%, still an appreciable hazard (Map 2A). These include Poway Creek and three adjacent unnamed basins on the western edge of the fire; tributaries to San Vicente and Barona Creeks; tributaries to the San Diego River below and above El Capitan Reservoir; tributaries to Cedar and Boulder Creeks; a few tributaries to Conejos and King Creeks; one tributary to the Sweetwater River; Viejas Creek; and several basins in the southern extension of the fire, including Chocolate and Harbison Canyons and Forester Creek. Debris flows with peak discharges between 1,501 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (43 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 2B).

### **Cedar Fire—2-year, 1-hour storm of 0.67 inches (17.0 mm)**

Four unnamed basins that drain into El Capitan Reservoir and 23 tributaries to Conejos and King Creeks show a probability of debris-flow occurrence greater than 67% in response to the 2-year, 1-hour storm (Map 3A). Tributaries to San Vicente and Barona Creeks; the San Diego River above, along and below El Capitan Reservoir; and most of the tributaries to Conejos and King Creeks show probabilities of debris-flow occurrence between 33 and 67% (Map 3A). Debris-flow peak discharges between 1,501 and 3,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (42 and 85 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 3B).

### **Paradise Fire—25-year, 1-hour storm of 1.30 inches (33.0 mm)**

Of the 80 basins evaluated in this assessment, 67 were identified as having probabilities greater than 67% that debris flows will occur in response to the 25-year, 1-hour rainstorm (Map 1A). These include most of the tributaries to Paradise, Guejito, and Hell Creeks, and to the San Luis Rey River; Boden Canyon; and basins that drain into the Pamo Valley. In response to a 25-year, 1-hour storm, debris-flow peak discharges between 3,001 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (85 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 1B).

Eight additional basins show probabilities of debris-flow occurrence between 33 and 67%, still an appreciable hazard (Map 1A). These include tributaries to Guejito and Hell Creeks; basins that drain into the Pamo Valley; including Temescal Creek; and tributaries to the San Luis Rey River. Debris-flow peak discharges between 3,001 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (85 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are also estimated for these basins (Map 1B).

### **Paradise Fire—10-year, 1-hour storm of 1.00 inches (25.4 mm)**

In response to a 10-year, 1-hour storm, a probability of debris-flow occurrence greater than 67% is identified for numerous basins within the Paradise Fire (Map 2A). These include most of the tributaries to Paradise and Hell Creeks; some of the tributaries to Guejito Creek and to the San Luis Rey River; Boden Canyon; and basins that drain into the Pamo valley. Debris flows with peak discharges between 3,001 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (85 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 2B).

In response to this storm, 15 basins show probabilities of debris-flow occurrence between 33 and 67%, still an appreciable hazard (Map 2A). These include basins that drain into the San Luis Rey River; tributaries to Paradise and Guejito Creeks; and a tributary to the Pamo Valley. Debris-flow peak discharges between 3,001 and 6,000 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (85 and 170 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 2B).



## **Paradise Fire—2-year, 1-hour storm of 0.67 inches (17.0 mm)**

Ten basins show a probability of debris-flow occurrence greater than 67% in response to the 2-year, 1-hour storm (Map 3A). These include tributaries to Hell Creek and to the San Lius Rey River. Debris-flow peak discharges between 1,501 and 4,500 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (42 and 127 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 3B). Tributaries to Paradise and Guejito Creeks; Boden Canyon; and basins that drain into the Pamo Valley show probabilities of debris-flow occurrence between 33 and 67% (Map 3A). Debris-flow peak discharges between 1,501 and 4,500 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (42 and 127 m<sup>3</sup>/s) are estimated for these basins (Map 3B).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The basins identified as having probabilities of debris-flow occurrence greater than about 33% and the highest peak discharges are extremely dangerous for anyone living, working, or recreating within or downstream from them during rainfall events similar to, or greater than, the storms used in this evaluation. Of the storms evaluated here, the hazard level is greatest for the 25-year storm, although the probability of this storm occurring is only about 4% in any given year. The probability of debris-flow occurrence is certainly lower for the 10- and 2-year storms; however, the estimated peak discharges of greater than 1,501 ft<sup>3</sup>/s (42 m<sup>3</sup>/s) associated with these storms can be quite destructive.

In addition to the potential dangers within these basins, areas downstream from the basin outlets are also at risk. In some of these areas homes were destroyed by the fires, and workers and residents may be busy cleaning and rebuilding sites. These people are at high risk for impact by debris flow during rainfall events, such as those used in this assessment. In addition, in the event of the passage of a debris flow, there is a great possibility of culverts plugging or being overwhelmed, and of roads washing out. Such events can strand motorists for long periods of time. In some cases, drainages cross roads on blind curves where motorists could abruptly encounter debris-flow deposits on the road.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is imperative to insure that people occupying businesses, homes, and recreational facilities downstream of the basins identified as the most hazardous are informed of the potential dangers from debris flows and flooding. Warning must be given even for those basins with mitigation structures at their mouths in the event that the structures are not adequate to contain potential debris-flow events. We further recommend site-specific debris-flow hazard assessments be performed upslope from structures and facilities identified as being at risk and that could be impacted by flows from basins smaller than those evaluated here. In addition, this assessment is specific to post-fire debris-flow activity; further assessment of potential hazards posed by flash floods is necessary. And last, we highly recommend the establishment of an early-warning system for both flash floods and debris flows. Such a system should consist of an extensive reporting rain gage and stream gage network coupled with National Weather Service weather forecasts. Any early-warning system should be coordinated with existing county and flood district facilities.

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## Figures/Maps

Figure 1. Location of the Cedar and Paradise Fires in southern California.

Map 1A. Probability of Fire-Related Debris Flow in Response to 25-Year, 1-Hour Storm

Map 1B. Estimated Peak Discharges of Fire-Related Debris Flows in Response to 25-Year, 1-Hour Storm

Map 2A. Probability of Fire-Related Debris Flow in Response to 10-Year, 1-Hour Storm

Map 2B. Estimated Peak Discharges of Fire-Related Debris Flows in Response to 10-Year, 1-Hour Storm

Map 3A. Probability of Fire-Related Debris Flow in Response to 2-Year, 1-Hour Storm

Map 3B. Estimated Peak Discharges of Fire-Related Debris Flows in Response to 2-Year, 1-Hour Storm

These maps are not to be used for flood insurance rating purposes under the National Flood Insurance Program. For insurance rating purposes, please refer to the currently effective Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). To obtain a copy of the FIRM, contact the FEMA Map Service Center at 1-800-385-9616, or at <http://store/mcs.fema.gov>

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