

Crews tally damage from Calif.'s 3rd largest fire

By Tracie Cone, AP

Scientists are assessing the damage from a massive wildfire burning around Yosemite National Park, laying plans to protect habitat and waterways as the fall rainy season approaches.

Members of the federal Burned Area Emergency Response team were hiking the rugged Sierra Nevada terrain Saturday even as thousands of firefighters still were battling the four-week-old blaze, now the third-largest wildfire in modern California history.

Federal officials have amassed a team of 50 scientists, more than twice what is usually deployed to assess wildfire damage. With so many people assigned to the job, they hope to have a preliminary report ready in two weeks so remediation can start before the first storms, Alex Janicki, the Stanislaus National Forest BAER response coordinator, said.

Team members are working to identify areas at the highest risk for erosion into streams, the Tuolumne River and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, San Francisco's famously pure water supply.

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