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Annual Report

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Mitigation Action Plan Annual Report

October 2014

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Mountain bikers at the Potrillo Canyon Trailhead, summer 2014.

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ACRONYM LIST

DOE	Department of Energy
EA	environmental assessment
ENV-ES	Environmental Stewardship Services (Group)
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FY	Fiscal Year
LANL	Los Alamos National Laboratory
LANS	Los Alamos National Security, LLC
MAP	Mitigation Action Plan
MAPAR	Mitigation Action Plan Annual Report
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NNSA	National Nuclear Security Administration
SWEIS	Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement
TA	Technical Area

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Trails Management Program Mitigation Action Plan Annual Report (Trails MAPAR) has been prepared for the Department of Energy (DOE)/National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) as part of implementing the 2003 *Final Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Los Alamos National Laboratory Trails Management Program* (DOE 2003). The Trails Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) is now a part of the *Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for the Continued Operation of Los Alamos National Laboratory (DOE/EIS 0380) Mitigation Action Plan* (SWEIS MAP) (DOE 2008). The MAP provides guidance for the continued implementation of the Trails Management Program at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and integration of future mitigation actions into the SWEIS MAP to decrease impacts associated with recreational trails use at LANL.

This ninth MAPAR includes a summary of the LANL Trails Management Program activities and actions during Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, from October 2013 through September 2014.

2.0 CONTEXT: TRAILS AT LANL

Trails use at LANL has been considered one of the benefits of working and living in Los Alamos County. However, there was never an explicit DOE or LANL policy or mechanism to balance recreational trails use on LANL property with environmental, cultural, safety, security, and operational concerns. In 2003, the DOE directed LANL to establish such a program. DOE/NNSA published the *Final Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Los Alamos National Laboratory Trails Management Program* and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (DOE 2003) in September 2003. The NNSA issued a MAP for this environmental assessment (EA) on the same date.

The most pertinent trails issues identified in the EA were:

- DOE/NNSA does not have a public recreational mission established by Congress.
- The public gets conflicting messages regarding trail use on LANL property because signs, access controls, and enforcement at LANL vary.
- Trespassing occasionally occurs from LANL onto adjacent lands where trail use is not permitted.
- Trail use poses threats to some cultural and natural resources.
- Trail use in certain LANL areas increases the risks of human exposure at potential release sites, and other operational and natural hazards including wildfires.
- Security concerns are posed by the use of certain LANL trails.

The MAP established the Trails Management Program, which is implemented through individual projects, including measures for planning, repair and construction, environmental protection,

safety, security, and post-repair and construction end-state conditions assessments. A standing Trails Working Group made up of LANL and other agency's stakeholders was formed to carry out this program.

In March 2014, at the request of the DOE/NNSA Los Alamos Field Office, the Los Alamos National Security, LLC (LANS) Environmental Stewardship Services Group (ENV-ES) prepared a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Review evaluating whether the *Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Los Alamos National Laboratory Trails Management Program* (DOE 2003) required supplementation and/or revision. LANS NEPA staff concluded that the analyses in the 2003 EA was still relevant and its description and resource impacts remained accurate and did not require an update or supplementation. The NEPA Review noted that there have been local changes that have a potential to affect resources and resource management since the 2003 EA, including:

- The Las Conchas Fire impacted LANL watersheds and canyons where there are actively-used trails.
- The listing of the Jemez Mountains salamander as endangered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The salamander has habitat in some areas at LANL where there are actively-used trails.
- Ongoing drought and climate change impacts (similar to the drought impacts that existed pre-Cerro Grande Fire).
- Increased use of certain LANL trails by the public as a result of social media, and restrictions on adjoining public lands.
- Impacts to cultural resources in areas accessible to the general public.

The NEPA Review noted that LANS and DOE/NNSA have worked together and done much to promote better trails management in the 10 years since the EA, associated FONSI, and MAP were released. Specifically, LANS has been conducting public tours and is in the process of installing fencing and kiosks with information about the rules and risks associated with recreational trails use at trailheads across Technical Areas (TAs) 70 and 71. In addition, a new LANL website "Taking Care of Our Trails" (<http://www.lanl.gov/community-environment/environmental-stewardship/protection/trails/index.php>) now provides maps and guidance that balance responsible stewardship with the privilege of public access.

The NEPA Review concluded that while there have been some changes, which potentially affect the resources analyzed in the 2003 EA, these changes are not significant in context or intensity. Therefore, no update or supplementation of the 2003 EA was recommended because the MAP associated with the EA, in conjunction with the LANL Cultural and Habitat Resources Management Plans, are in place to manage these resources and mitigate impacts. These Management Plans are in place to address issues as they arise using an adaptive management approach.

Trails management program goals:

- Reduce the risk of damage and injury to property, human life, health, and sensitive natural and cultural resources from social trail use at LANL.
- Facilitate the establishment of a safe, viable network of linked trails across the Pajarito Plateau that traverse land holdings of various private and government entities for recreational use and for alternate transportation purposes without posing a threat to DOE and NNSA mission support work at LANL or disrupting LANL operations.
- Maintain the security of LANL operations.
- Respect the wishes of local Pueblos to maintain access to traditional cultural properties by Pueblo members while also preventing unauthorized public access to adjacent Pueblo lands and other lands identified as both religious and culturally sensitive areas to Native American communities.
- Adapt trail use at LANL to changing conditions and situations in a responsive manner.
- Maintain the recreational functionality of DOE lands so that the land remains open to all members of the public for non-motorized recreation, in compliance with federal laws and LANL operational constraints.

3.0 TRAILS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Trails Working Group met nine times in FY 2014. The Trails Working Group held its 100th meeting in August 2014. Typically, Trails Working Group attendees include subject-matter experts from LANL, representatives from Los Alamos County, nearby Pueblos, Bandelier National Monument, the Santa Fe National Forest, and interested local residents. Meetings provide an ongoing and in-depth forum for discussing and resolving trails mitigation issues that arise from active adaptive management. What follows are the highlights of the FY 2014 Trails Management Plan implementation at LANL.

3.1 Fixing and Protecting Trails

Trail repair and protection continued to focus primarily on the 4,000-acre tracts known as TAs 70 and 71 located between White Rock and Bandelier National Monument. This buffer area is easily accessed from Pajarito Acres and State Road 4, and has been used by the public for decades. The trailhead at Gate 9 that provides vehicular access from State Road 4 to an electrical substation was closed in FY 2014 because there are other more suitable trailheads nearby. Shortly thereafter the fence was cut in a number of places. Repairs were made to the fence and there has been no further damage or unauthorized entrance observed.

3.2 Public Information

In FY 2014, the Trails Management Program assigned names to all of the major trails in TAs 70 and 71, including those that had not previously had been named. Maps have been revised to reflect these changes. Signs were installed in the trailhead kiosks at TAs 70 and 71. These signs include QR (quick response) codes that can be scanned by smart phones to obtain trail maps and more detailed information about the trails and Trails Management Program. Enhanced outreach to local groups such as the Sierra Club and the Pajarito Environmental Education Center reinforced the need to contact the Trails Working Group when formal group tours are desired. A presentation about the Trails Management Program was made by LANS staff during a PEEC meeting in May 2014.

In order to provide more information to the public, the Trails Management Program updated the “Taking Care of Our Trails” website (<http://www.lanl.gov/community-environment/environmental-stewardship/protection/trails/index.php>) during FY 2014. The website states that continued access and use of LANL trails is contingent upon being good stewards of these federal lands. There are interactive map features and descriptions, and a revised pdf brochure *Trails Management at LANL*.

3.3 Cultural and Biological Resources Protection

In order to improve protection from damage by off-trail mountain bike use, the major thrust of cultural resources protection during FY 2014 were Trails Management Program efforts to enhance controls and increase public awareness about trails use in TAs 70 and 71. In the late spring of 2014, Pajarito Acres residents reported a new unapproved mountain bike trail near the intersection of the Lower Water Canyon and Ruin Mesa Trails. ENV-ES staff investigated and blocked off the trails and posted signs closing the area. A media campaign about responsible mountain bike use on LANL trails followed, and no further incidents have been reported.



During FY 2014, the Trails Working Group developed a TA70 and 71 Group Visits Policy. The DOE/NNSA Los Alamos Field Office asked LANS to assist in defining what such a policy might entail. The Field Office was responding in part to recent concerns expressed in correspondence from one of the neighboring Pueblos and a recent publicized group tour organized by a local environmental education organization. TAs 70 and 71 are adjacent to Pajarito Acres and accessible by the public from many trailheads along State Road 4. They are popular locales for hiking, biking, and equestrian activities. These DOE lands are not developed but they are designated in LANL planning documents as reserve/buffer and set aside for future experimental science. It is also deemed a “General Access Area” which allows public access. The area is replete with cultural resource sites that must be protected. The Trails Management Program has addressed these concerns during the past several years through a combination of improved signs and trailhead kiosks, access modifications, trail realignments, trail closures, and public outreach/education.

Trails Management Program staff also coordinated a site visit to the Anniversary Trail in March 2014 that provided more detailed information about cultural and historic resources to Los Alamos County’s project team working on a new water supply line that would traverse this area. Sites will be avoided and protected once the project commences.

The LANL Habitat Management Plan provides a strategy for the protection of threatened and endangered species and their habitats on LANL property. The Mexican Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax trailii extimus*) are federally listed threatened or endangered species and may occur in areas traversed by trails. Mexican Spotted Owl surveys began on March 1 and concluded mid-May. There were seasonal trail closures when these surveys were conducted. Most trails were reopened, but trails in areas where the surveys indicated owls were present remained closed until August 31. Reopening the Los Alamos Canyon Trail between State Road 4 and West Road was discussed, as was the possibility of including it in the Bandelier National Monument patrol area. Issues concerning Mexican Spotted Owl impacts in the Canyon, and polychlorinated biphenyl cleanup would need to be resolved before the area could open to the public. Some parts of Los Alamos Canyon are potential habitat for the Jemez Mountain Salamander (*Plethodon neomexicanus*), added to the federal list of threatened and endangered species in 2013.

During FY 2014, the Trails Working Group continued to review the problem of feral cattle in White Rock Canyon, which can be accessed by LANL hiking trails. This is a trails management issue for several reasons. The canyon is part of the White Rock Canyon Reserve, which is an inappropriate place for cattle. There are sensitive species present, and there is a potential for the cattle to damage habitat and cultural resources, and they threaten the safety of hikers. Cameras installed in FY 2013 on the Ancho Springs Trail showed wildlife including bear, cougar, bobcat, and also cattle. A report with recommendations for feral cattle removal options was submitted to the DOE/NNSA Los Alamos Field Office in FY 2013 and is pending further action.

3.4 Security and Safety

During FY 2014, the Trails Management Program continued to coordinate with Bandelier National Monument on patrols and law enforcement in TAs70/71. This has been facilitated by the revised Superintendent's Compendium and agreement between DOE/NNSA and the Park Service that allows enforcement pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations on certain DOE lands at LANL. LANS cultural resources staff contacts Bandelier National Monument personnel when doing field work in the areas patrolled by National Park Service rangers. The Trails Working Group contacts LANS security on matters of unauthorized trails use and parking to access trails. The Trails Management Program also coordinated with the Los Alamos County Trails and Open Space Program on a variety of issues affecting both Los Alamos County and LANL/DOE, including trails maintenance, closures, and way-finding.

Clarification was issued after many inquiries regarding use of LANL trails for the hobby of geocaching. The Trails Management Program worked with Los Alamos County Trails and Open Space staff to contact local geocaching points of contact to inform them that these activities are not allowed on LANL property, and requested that existing geocaches be removed.

There were no trail closures at LANL resulting from rains or flooding in FY 2014. However, pedestrian, bike, and vehicular access to the Mortandad Bench Trail was restricted from July 25 to August 11 for security reasons. Trails Management Program staff helped LANS physical security to plan and coordinate this closure. The Mortandad Canyon Trail is closed indefinitely due to large scale remediation work taking place in the canyon.

4.0 REFERENCES

DOE 2003. US Department of Energy, 2003. Finding of No Significant for the Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Los Alamos National Laboratory Trails Management Program, DOE/EA-1431, Los Alamos, New Mexico.

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