
**Department of Energy
Finding of No Significant Impact
for the
Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program
at
Los Alamos National Laboratory,
Los Alamos, New Mexico**

**U. S. Department of Energy
Los Alamos Area Office
528 35th Street
Los Alamos, NM 87544**

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program
at Los Alamos National Laboratory,
Los Alamos, New Mexico

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT: The Environmental Assessment (EA) for *Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program at Los Alamos National Laboratory (DOE/EA-1329)* (attached) provides sufficient evidence and analysis to determine that a Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is appropriate for the Proposed Action (the No Burn Alternative). The EA documents the evidence and analysis in the following chapters: 1. Purpose and Need for Agency Action; 2. Description of the Proposed Action and Associated Alternatives; 3. Affected Environment; and 4. Environmental Consequences.

Analyses performed in the EA conclude that potential adverse effects of the Proposed Action, under normal conditions, would be minimal. No short-term or long-term adverse effects are expected to occur to air quality, visual resources, water quality, soil erosion, cultural resources, waste management, human health, socioeconomics, or utilities and infrastructure. Only biological resources would be affected long-term; beneficial effects to a variety of resources including biological are expected. Engineering and administrative controls or considerations that serve to lessen any potential for adverse environmental effects have been incorporated as integral features of the Proposed Action. Examples of this type of mitigating feature include: the careful planning that must go into each project before it is implemented, including a Facility and Forest Fire Hazard Assessment, Identification of Resource Issues, coordination with neighboring land management agencies and land owners, development of end-state conditions, formulation of treatment and environmental protection measures; the use of worker protection and health and safety measures tailored to each project; the use of hand tools to remove vegetation from cultural resource sites; the use of non-sparking equipment during periods of extreme fire danger; and the use of Best Management

Practices to prevent surface soil erosion and sediment migration controls where soil disturbances are unavoidable.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) has analyzed the potential environmental consequences of three additional alternatives besides the Proposed Action. These other alternatives are the: Limited Burn (waste only), Burn (both treatment and forest waste) and No Action. Presently DOE has a moratorium that will likely be in effect until the December 2000 time frame when the DOE plans to issue its new policy on the use of prescribed burning. This policy development effort will be coordinated with the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Accordingly, DOE will not make a decision on the appropriateness of issuing a FONSI on either the Limited Burn Alternative or the Burn Alternative until after this policy has been issued.

The EA considered the cumulative effects of the Proposed Action with past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions. The Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program would enhance the forest recovery efforts associated with the Cerro Grande Fire within LANL boundaries. Future foreseeable non-Department of Energy activities on land administered by neighboring land-owners and agencies are likely to be of a similar nature to the forest thinning proposed. The impacts from implementation of this management program and associated activities over about 10,000 acres (4,000 ha) would be a minor contribution to the overall cumulative adverse and positive impacts due to forest management practices and the implementation of other projects within the region of concern along the Pajarito Plateau in the East Jemez Mountains.

PREDECISIONAL DRAFT REVIEW & COMMENT: On July 6, 2000, the Department of Energy invited review and comment on the predecisional draft EA from the State of New Mexico; four nearby American Indian Tribes: Cochiti, Jemez, Santa Clara and San Ildefonso (sometimes referred to as the four accord pueblos because each tribe has entered into an accord with the Department of Energy); and the Mescalero Apache Tribe. In addition, the Department of Energy made the predecisional draft EA available to the general public at the same time it was provided to the State and Tribes. The availability of the EA to the public was accomplished by placing it in the Department of Energy Public Reading Rooms located within the Los Alamos National Laboratory's Community Outreach Center and Reading Room, and in the University of New Mexico's Zimmerman Library in Albuquerque. A notice was placed in three local newspapers announcing the availability of the draft EA for review, and the availability of the

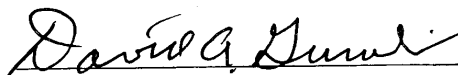
document was also announced during a public meeting sponsored by DOE that was broadcast live by the KRSN AM radio station on July 7, 2000. The predecisional draft EA was also placed on the World Wide Web Computer Internet System. Additionally, over 50 local stakeholder groups and individuals, which have identified themselves as interested parties with regards to LANL activities, were notified by letter of the availability of the predecisional draft on July 6, 2000. Copies of the EA were provided to all interested parties for their review upon their requests. The review and comment period was 22 days long and ended on July 28, 2000, although comments received after that time period had lapsed were considered. Six separate parties provided comments to the draft EA. Comments were received from: the Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Santa Fe National Forest; Mr. Terrell Johnson; the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club; the State of New Mexico, Environment Department; the Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office and Mr. Raymond Tell, P.E. These sets of comments were addressed in the Final EA, individual responses to the comments were prepared by DOE, and these responses were sent to the respondents together with copies of the Final EA.

AGENCY CONSULTATIONS: No likely adverse effects to Federally-listed threatened and endangered species or their habitat are anticipated during the implementation of projects conducted under the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Management Program. DOE implemented a Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for LANL in March 1999; all projects implemented under this Management Program will comply with the HMP or with additional restrictions developed through consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred on DOE's determination that the proposed action "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" the Mexican spotted owl, the bald eagle, the whooping crane and the southwestern willow flycatcher or their critical habitat for the implementation of the HMP. The Service will be consulted on the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program's management plan (which will be part of the Biological Resources Management Plan) before individual projects are performed. It is expected that all activities whether covered by the HMP or under the to-be-developed Biological Resources Management Plan would be designed to avoid an adverse affect to either species individuals or their critical habitat. Similarly, there are not likely to be adverse effects to historic, prehistoric or other cultural

resources as a result of implementation of this program. The State Historic Preservation Officer has recently entered into a Programmatic Agreement with DOE regarding undertakings of no effect to cultural resources. Projects implemented under the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program would be expected to comply with the provisions of the Programmatic Agreement or any additional provisions developed through the to-be-developed LANL Cultural Resources Management Plan's consultation process. DOE's compliance requirements under the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act will be on-going for the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program due to the long term nature of the program. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Santa Fe National Forest and San Ildefonso Pueblo participated in the preparation of the subject EA as Cooperating Agencies (as defined in 40 CFR 1501.6). The Interagency Wildfire Management Team also provided information that was used in the preparation of this EA.

FINDING: The United States Department of Energy finds that there would be no significant impact from proceeding with its proposal to implement the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Improvement Program at Los Alamos National Laboratory as described in the Proposed Action. This finding is based on the EA that analyzes the consequences of the relevant issues of environmental concern. The Department of Energy makes this Finding of No Significant Impact pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 [42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.], the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act [40 CFR 1500] and the Department of Energy National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures [10 CFR 1021]. Therefore, no environmental impact statement is required for this proposal.

Signed in Los Alamos, New Mexico this 10th day of August, 2000,
2000.



David A. Gurulé, P.E.

Area Manager

Los Alamos Area Office

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: For further information on this proposal, this Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI), or the Department of Energy's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review program concerning proposals at Los Alamos National Laboratory, please contact:

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Copies of this FONSI (with the Environmental Assessment attached) will be made available for public review at the DOE Public Reading Room within the Los Alamos National Laboratory Community Relations Office, 1619 Central Avenue, Los Alamos, New Mexico, 87544 at (505) 665-4400 or (800) 508-4400. Copies will also be made available within the DOE Public Reading Room at the Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87131 at (505) 277-5441.