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**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
DOUBLE TRACKS TEST SITE REMEDIATION**

AGENCY: U. S. Department of Energy (DOE)

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Energy, with the approval of the U.S. Air Force, proposes to characterize and remediate a plutonium-contaminated site known as Double Tracks, situated on the Nellis Air Force Range (NAFR) complex. The site was contaminated in 1963 by the Atomic Energy Commission in a joint U.S.-Great Britain test of the safety of nuclear weapons under accident conditions. The Environmental Assessment (EA) considers the Proposed Action, No Action, and three additional alternatives. The Preapproval Draft EA was released for review to local and state governments, the NTS Citizen's Advisory Board (CAB), and interested publics. Comments were received from the CAB, Nye County, Esmeralda Board of County Commissioners, Esmeralda County Citizen's Advisory Council, People for the Constitution, U.S. Air Force Department of Environmental Management, Consolidated Group of Tribes and Organizations, State of Nevada Department of Administration, Nevada Assemblyman, "Roy" Neighbors, Pamela Siri, and Vic Skaar. Where necessary, based on these comments, revisions to the EA were completed. In addition, a detailed comment response document was prepared. Based on the analysis in the EA, a Finding of No Significant Impact is warranted.

COPIES OF THE EA ARE AVAILABLE FROM:

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Comment generally centered on concerns about transportation, notification of county sheriffs when shipments are commenced, and training of first responders in the local communities. A concern was expressed that springs may have been contaminated by animal transport of plutonium or that animals may transport plutonium into Goldfield. An also expressed concern was that dust devils could entrain plutonium particles and transport them to great heights and distance, and consequently, these vectors should be analyzed in the EA. Some commenters felt that certain passages were unclear and should be rewritten. The state commented that the relationship between cleanup standards and risk to future intruders at the site should be addressed in the final EA and that the relationship between the Air Force and BLM management responsibilities for the site be discussed. Other comments were directed at the specific implementation of the project, including a preference for not drilling an onsite water well, not using a rotomill for soil removal, providing for adequate water to deal with high winds, analyzing costs by alternative, conveying and use of pilot cars for transport on public highways, and use of local vendors and employees where possible. Some commenters opposed the Proposed Action or expressed preferences for one alternative or another or variations of the Proposed Action.

The remediation is a voluntary interim corrective action to implement Federal and applicable state requirements to clean up contaminated sites. The site was chosen for the initial effort because it presents relatively benign administrative, technical, and logistical challenges. The project's purpose is to demonstrate and evaluate excavation technologies for plutonium-contaminated soils, acquire cost data, and protect human health and the environment. Appropriate technology could then be scaled up or adapted if it is determined to be necessary to remediate the much larger areas of plutonium-contaminated soils elsewhere on the Nevada Test Site (NTS) and NAFR Complex.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would include establishing a staging area for on-site project administration, operations, maintenance, and decontamination; excavating soil contaminated in excess of 200pCi/g; transporting excavated soil from the NAFR through the Tonopah Test Range (TTR) and to the NTS for disposal at an existing low level radioactive waste management site via public highways, through Tonopah, Goldfield, and Beatty. The remediation site and staging area would be revegetated at completion of activities. The three additional alternatives entail the same remediation actions as the Proposed Action. Two of the three propose different waste transportation routes, while the third proposes storing waste soils at the TTR pending a decision regarding the opening of a disposal facility at the NTS utilizing a collapse crater for disposal of bulk plutonium-contaminated soils. The two transportation options include construction of a road from the Double Tracks site directly southwest to Highway 95 near Lida Junction and construction of a road extending south through the NAFR to access the NTS at Pahute Mesa. The latter route would not involve public highways for any segment. A No Action alternative was also analyzed. Subsequent to the circulation of the preapproval draft EA, the Proposed Action was altered by dropping the proposal to drill a well and to utilize the rotomill for excavation. Use of the blade and scraper will likely be the option chosen. So that another alternative is not required, the analysis in the EA remains based on the Proposed Action as originally set forth. This ensures that the analysis is bounding and complete.

Environmental factors considered include: geology and soils, microclimate, water quality, surface and groundwater, biological resources, air quality, noise, land-use and aesthetics, historical and cultural resources, socioeconomic, environmental justice, traffic and transportation, waste management, and public safety.

Analyses in the Environmental Assessment indicate that no significant impact to the environment is likely to occur as a result of the Proposed Action or any of the alternatives. Soils, vegetation, and resident small birds and mammals would be affected temporarily on approximately 4 ha (10ac) due to soil stripping and the construction of a staging area. Alternatives 1 and 2 would disturb, respectively, 29 ha (72 ac) and 18 ha (44 ac) of new surface for road construction. The alternatives which use the NAFR would create a slight impact on roadside wildlife populations due to the road construction and use. Similarly, there would be a slight increase in risk of collisions involving trucks and wild horses. Remediation of the site would result in removal of the fence and would make the area available for use by the Air Force and by the public if the Air Force should not maintain its public lands withdrawal at some future time. As analyzed in the risk assessment, human health effects are dominated by the industrial aspects of the project, apply to the workers, and are extremely small.

The site is remote, dry, supports a paucity of natural resources, and is limited in size. The heaviest contamination exists in discrete pieces which are readily located and retrieved. Operational requirements that are part of the Proposed Action will ensure that risk of release of contaminants is extremely small.

DETERMINATION: Based on the information and analyses in the EA, DOE has determined that the Proposed Action of Characterizing and Remediating the Double Tracks Plutonium-contaminated Soil Site on the Nellis Air Force Range would not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, DOE has determined that an environmental impact statement is not required.

Issued this ^{30th} day of April, 1996.



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