



**Written Testimony to the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives**

The Role of NEPA in the States of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming

August 1, 2005

Dear Committee Members:

I respectfully request that this testimony be read into the hearing record. I have had ample experience with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). One example that I would like to particularly highlight concerns a 1999 Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) for Continuing Operations at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

In the draft LANL SWEIS the Department of Energy completely omitted consideration of wildfire as a serious risk to the Lab. Due to my comments and others the DOE included a detailed wildfire analysis in the final SWEIS. Moreover, DOE began implementing some wildfire mitigation measures that soon proved to be invaluable.

As the Committee Members likely know, in April 2000 an extremely serious wildfire broke out after a proscribed burn went out of control in Bandelier National Park, ultimately burning some 48,000 acres. Both the Lab and the Los Alamos townsite were evacuated for a week. What is remarkable is that the Cerro Grande Fire closely followed the NEPA analysis in the final SWEIS.

A senior Lab official told me that during the height of the emergency LANL personnel would read that analysis as a game plan for how the fire would behave next. Most important were the fire mitigation measures implemented near Technical Area 54, which stores radioactive transuranic wastes in fabric air buildings. The fire ultimately stopped just some few hundred yards from TA-54. Had there not been some prior fire prevention measures the results could have been catastrophic.

I submit that the above is concrete demonstration of the value of NEPA in general and public comment in particular. It is unlikely that DOE would have conducted a wildfire analysis in the 1999 final LANL SWEIS without public comment. In the heat of the emergency, the Lab tangibly benefited from its existence.

Keeping in mind this example of tangible benefit to the federal government arising from the NEPA process, I respectfully urge the Committee Members to support and help preserve the National Environmental Policy Act.

Sincerely,
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