

Trails Management at LANL



New informational kiosk and gates installed at the Potrillo Canyon Loop trailhead in TA-71 near Pajarito Acres.

Background

Recreational trails use at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) has been considered one of the benefits of working and living in Los Alamos County (LAC). However, there was never an explicit Department of Energy (DOE)/National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) or Los Alamos National Security, LLC policy or mechanism to balance trails use on LANL property with environmental, cultural, safety, security, and operational concerns. In 2003, the DOE directed LANL to establish a trails management program. DOE/NNSA published the *Final Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Los Alamos National Laboratory Trails Management Program* (EA) and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in September 2003. The EA also contains a "Mitigation Action Plan" with specific trails-related mitigations that LANL must implement and monitor.

Trails Working Group

The Trails Management Program established the Trails Working Group (TWG) which has been meeting monthly since late 2003. The TWG consists of representatives from DOE, Bandelier National Monument (BNM), United States Forest Service (USFS), LAC, local residents and stakeholders, nearby Pueblos, and several LANL representatives. The TWG provides trail policy

guidance and implements trail closures and maintenance, coordinates tours, and works with BNM rangers to ensure regulatory compliance and protection of these lands. The TWG also serves as an important network that keeps parties abreast of trails-related information and actions within the greater Northern New Mexico region.

Challenges

The TWG faces numerous challenges in balancing recreational use of the over 50 miles of LANL trails with resource protection, safety, and security concerns. These include:

Cultural Resource Protection: The 4,000-acre tract located between White Rock and BNM, known as Technical Areas (TAs) 70 and 71, contains many cultural resources that must be protected.

Biological Resource Protection: Trails in and around the TA-03 area have seasonal restrictions and closures in order to protect Threatened and Endangered Species such as the Mexican Spotted Owl and the Jemez Mountain Salamander.

User Safety and Trail Maintenance: LANL trails range from the Rio Grande in the east to Highway 501 in the west and traverse various terrains from mesa tops to canyon bottoms. Required trail maintenance activities include repair of flood damage and erosion, removal of hazard trees and snags, inventorying trails and their condition, mitigating the impacts of ongoing drought and climate change, and trail closures and reroutes. The TWG also coordinates with wildland fire crews and closes trails in times of high fire danger. In addition, trail use has increased due to social media and restrictions on adjoining lands. This increased traffic requires increased patrols and trail maintenance. A diversity in trail signage contributes to conflicting messages regarding trails and their status.

Security: Certain trails need to be periodically closed for security reasons and to prevent trespassing in areas not open for recreational use. In addition, some trails are open to the public

while others are only open to LANL badge holders; thus, trail use and access must be managed.

Tours: Outside groups occasionally request guided tours on LANL lands. These tours need to be coordinated with the DOE Field Office and implemented by LANL through the TWG.

Active Trails Management

To address these challenges, the TWG has taken a more active “on-the-ground” approach to trails management to better manage trails, improve trail users’ experience and understanding of the rules of use, and ensure regulatory compliance, safety, and security.

Official Trails: In order to facilitate trails management, the TWG has designated “Official Trails” on LANL property. These Official Trails will be maintained and shown on maps while use of other trails will be discouraged. In TAs 70 and 71, 11 new kiosks (made from recycled plastic) were installed at trailheads, and old trail signs have been removed in an effort to standardize information for all LANL trails. The kiosks contain maps, hazard information, contact information and rules of use. In addition to the kiosks, new emergency access gates and equestrian gates were also installed. Other areas that have traditionally been used as trailheads have been closed in order to protect sensitive areas and direct users to the official trailheads. Signage along the highway will be installed and parking areas for official trailheads will be constructed.



Installation of new informational kiosk at the trailhead for the Old Road trail in TA-70.

Trails Websites: A new LANL Trails website provides information about trails on LANL property. The website contains trail maps that can be downloaded to computers, tablets, and smart phones and used in Google Maps or Google Earth. Other pertinent information on the website includes rules of use; a list of all LANL trails with access, status, mileage, and elevation change information; and links to other sites that maintain regional trails information (LAC, USFS, BNM, Valles Caldera, etc.). There are also web pages for the TWG and a Trails Blog. QR Codes on the trail kiosks load the new trails website when scanned with a smart phone so hikers can download maps right at the trailheads. [LANL Trails Website](#)

Public Education: The TWG oversees a public education campaign to inform the public of the LANL trails system, changes to trailheads and trails, and the rules of use for the trails. In June 2013, a well-attended public meeting was held in White Rock, New Mexico, regarding issues with trails use, cultural resources, and stewardship efforts at TAs 70 and 71. In addition, TWG members occasionally give presentations on the LANL trail system at various community organization meetings and LANL staff periodically conduct guided tours for the public.

Cultural and Biological Resources: LANL archaeologists have identified trails that could potentially impact cultural resources and have closed or rerouted those trails to eliminate any impacts. These areas are inspected periodically to ensure compliance by trail users. When necessary, certain trails are periodically closed to protect Threatened and Endangered Species.

Security and Patrols: Through an agreement between DOE/NNSA and the Department of the Interior, BNM rangers actively patrol the TA 70 and 71 area and have patrol and police enforcement authority under 36 Code of Federal Regulations. Other LANL trails may be monitored by the LANL Protective Force. Several LANL trails are currently closed for security reasons. The TWG continues to coordinate with LANL Security on the reopening of the Los Alamos Canyon trail for public recreation.

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