

To: Michiko Martin, Objection Reviewing Officer
Email: objections-southwestern-regional-office@usda.gov

From: Laura Watchempino

Date: November 14, 2024

Subject: Interested Person Request regarding the Associated Plan Amendment to the Santa Fe National Forest's Land Management Plan

I would like to participate in discussions with the Forest Service regarding LANL's Electrical Power Capacity Upgrade (EPCU) is based on the objections I submitted on October 28, 2024.

Widespread public interest in maintaining and preserving the unique and outstanding ecological and cultural values of the Caja del Rio for present and future generations align with the collaborative land management goals outlined in the 2022 Forest Service Land Management Plan.

The Landscape Scale Restoration Program, a collaborative venture between the Forest Service, state, and private interests is one such collaborative effort to address large-scale issues like wildfire risk reduction, watershed protection and restoration, and the spread of invasive species, insect infestation and disease. All these issues should have been analyzed by the Forest Service in its draft Decision Notice and FONSI for the proposed EPCU project.

LANL and the private contractors that manage it are not exempt from complying with federal laws and regulations that protect and foster the public interest in preserving valuable and irreplaceable cultural and natural resources. LANL would like to have the Forest Service and public believe that its singular interests are paramount to the multiple uses and conservation goals of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 but cite no authority for that premise.

Instead, the public's right to participate in decisions involving major federal projects using public funds is a cornerstone of both National Environmental Policy Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act that should not be summarily dismissed without a comprehensive analysis of the need for the proposed project and reasonable alternatives that are available to meet those need(s).

DOE/NNSA and LANL have demonstrated an actual conflict of interest in their joint review of this proposed project for a dedicated power line to serve its own private interests which runs counter to the public's clearly articulated interest in maintaining and preserving the unique and outstanding ecological and cultural values of the Caja del Rio for present and future generations.

The Santa Fe National Forest Service articulated similar preservation goals in its 2022 Forest Service Land Management Plan that should have been upheld, especially when reasonable alternatives to meet the needs identified in the EPCU project proposal are available.

Thank you.