

PRESS RELEASE

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GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS REQUEST 30-DAY EXTENSION OF TIME TO PROVIDE COMMENTS ABOUT THE BUCKMAN DIVERSION PROJECT Forest Service Neglected to Announce Comment Period

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Buckman Diversion Project, but did not announce the public comment period in the Forest Service cover letter transmitting the Final EIS. Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS), Amigos Bravos, Rio Pueblo/Rio Embudo Watershed Protection Coalition, Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Project and Sebia Hawkins and Spin Dunbar, who are Aamodt Settlement Defendants, have written to the BLM and Forest Service, lead federal agencies for the EIS process, requesting a 30-day extension of time to provide comments about the Final EIS for the Buckman Diversion Project. The organizations and individuals assert that the BLM and Forest Service committed a procedural error in not announcing the comment period in the cover letter transmitting the Final EIS.

“We are also concerned that the issues raised by CCNS and Amigos Bravos in comments to the draft EIS about LANL contaminants reaching the surface water diversion project were considered ‘speculative’ by Forest Service and BLM,” said Joni Arends, CCNS Executive Director.

The New Mexico Environment Department also has serious concerns about contaminants traveling in surface water. On May 18, 2007, NMED released a report, entitled, “Distribution of Radionuclides in Northern Rio Grande Fluvial Deposits near LANL, NM,” which identifies and measures radiological contamination from past LANL operations in sediments along the Rio Grande.

The USDA and BLM need to justify their judgment that the concerns of CCNS and Amigos Bravos are “speculative.” It appears neither agency has an understanding of the current literature on the subject of contaminant transport in the arid Southwest. Especially pertinent are the recent findings and recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences report, entitled “Plans and Practices for Groundwater Protection at the LANL,” which was released on June 8, 2007. Brian Shields, Executive Director of Amigos Bravos, said, “We need to fully understand the impacts to water quality and quantity before moving forward with such an expensive project and the public needs adequate time to respond.” The August 10, 2006 estimated cost for the Buckman Diversion Project was \$158.7 million.

For example, one of the NAS detailed recommendations states:

“LANL should continue to develop surface water and sediment monitoring programs. LANL should continue, and improve, its control of contaminants moving down the canyons to prevent future surface transport and redistribution offsite of both mobile and sorbing contaminants. Measures to control surface water transport down canyons, including further reduction of aqueous discharges, removal of contaminated media, and appropriate use of barriers, are needed.” NAS Prepublication Copy, p. 54.

One of the largest inventories of LANL contaminants is located in the Los Alamos/Pueblo Canyon system. These contaminants are described in the NMED report and include plutonium, strontium and cesium. The Los Alamos/Pueblo Canyon system discharges to the Rio Grande above the proposed Buckman Diversion Project.

The impact area of the Buckman EIS does not include LANL and contaminant pathways from LANL to the EIS area, although documentation of LANL pollution in the Buckman well fields goes back to the early years operations. See “Historic and Current Discharges from LANL: Analysis and Recommendations,” by Amigos Bravos and CCNS. www.amigosbravos.org or www.nuclearactive.org.

Further, CCNS, Amigos Bravos and others have sent the 60-day Notice of Intent to Sue DOE for Violations of the Clean Water Act at LANL, which focuses on surface and storm water issues.

This story is far from over. The NAS report notes that while LANL has focused on surface water pollution and impacts, the whole issue of groundwater contamination from radioactive solid wastes buried at LANL has yet to be tackled by LANL, DOE, or contracting organizations. The NAS states that “Many if not all of the wells drilled into the regional aquifer under [LANL’s] Hydrogeologic Workplan appear to be compromised in their ability to produce water samples that are representative of ambient groundwater for the purpose of monitoring.” NAS, prepublication copy, p. 79.

Sebia Hawkins, one of the Aamodt Settlement Defendants, said, “We are only looking at the proverbial tip of the iceberg and what we know for certain is that we do not know the full extent of contamination at this time. Therefore, we believe that the conclusions in the draft EIS are reckless and far from conclusive and contrary to other federal and state agency documents to date.”

The groups and individuals requested a 30-day extension of time to provide comments to the BLM and Forest Service. If allowed, the public comment deadline would be July 18, 2007.

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Attachment: June 14, 2007 letter from the organizations and individuals to BLM and Forest Service