



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Las Cruces District Office
1800 Marquess Street
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88005
<https://www.blm.gov/new-mexico>

MAR 26 2024

In Reply Refer To:
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CERTIFIED--RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED
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Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, SVP Headquarters
Dr. Kenshu Shimada
SVP Government Affairs Committee
1660 International Drive, Suite 600
McLean, VA 22102-4877

Dear Dr. Shimada:

Thank you for your interest in the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Community Pit No. 1 project near Las Cruces, New Mexico that was referenced in your February 21 letter. The purpose of the project is to reduce public safety hazards within Community Pit No. 1 and reduce the chances of visitors' injury or death due to unstable high walls and unconsolidated material within the Community Pit No. 1 area. The action that BLM is currently taking is driven by ongoing monitoring of Community Pit No. 1, in which BLM has frequently observed public visitors climbing upon and underneath the undercuts of the highwalls. These highwalls consist of unstable and unconsolidated (loose) materials, are extremely dangerous, and pose a serious public safety hazard.

The project began in late November after months of planning and public involvement process from June 28, 2023, to July 14, 2023, that included sending over 500 notices to interested parties, a public meeting that was held in July 2023, and an opportunity for public comment. The project plan includes explosive work to approximately 65 feet of the limestone cap (Apache Dam Formation) and ripping approximately 35 feet of the red beds (Robledo Mountains Formation) for a total of 100 feet of vertical disturbance. The Robledo Mountains Formation has the potential to contain marine invertebrates, invertebrate trace fossils, vertebrate trace fossils and plants.

In accordance with the Environmental Assessment (EA) that was completed for the project (DOI-BLM-NM-L000-23023-0028-EA) and subsequent Decision Record, dated July 19, 2023, a BLM Paleontologist conducted general reconnaissance of the Community Pit No. 1 Project Area before any surface disturbance. No unique, rare, or note-worthy specimens were identified for documentation purposes. At the project's initiation, a Worker's Environmental Awareness

Program training was provided to the contractor and their employees as well as the Blasting Expert for potential inadvertent paleontological discoveries. As the project has progressed, the BLM Contracting Officer's Representative, a BLM Geologist, and the Authorized Officer in concert with the Contractor's Project Manager and the Blasting Expert have been monitoring the depth of overburden removal as the project progresses through the limestone cap.

As of March 22, 2024, the remaining limestone cap overburden is about 20 feet from the Robledo Mountains Formation (red beds) based on BLM's estimation of formation depths. The progression is specifically monitored via the drill core tailings being removed from the blast core holes. Once the overburden removal and blast core tailings expose the Robledo Mountain Formation, the BLM Paleontologist and other trained staff will monitor the exposed area, for marine invertebrates, invertebrate trace fossils, vertebrate trace fossils and plants. Monitoring will be conducted first and foremost with staff safety in mind and be accomplished in coordination with the project contractor who will provide oversight regarding equipment operation, site hazards, and staff safety. All of this will be done as discussed in the EA, Decision Record, and Finding of No Significant Impact.

The delineation of the Apache Dam Formation and the Robledo Mountains Formation is not a clean, perfectly horizontal segregation. Because of faulting in this zone, the contact between the two formations is laterally discontinuous and removal of the Apache Dam Formation may impact some portions of the Robledo Mountain Formation thereby potentially impacting fossils if they exist in this zone.

The BLM is fulfilling its obligation to reduce significant threats to public safety by implementing this project while providing monitoring for paleontological resources as the project progresses in accordance with the EA. By monitoring, trained BLM specialists will be able to assist in the documentation and inventory of fossils that may be impacted to the extent practicable considering employee safety. If you have any further questions, please contact David Wallace, Las Cruces Assistant District Manager at 575-525-4393.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott C. Cooke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Scott" being the most prominent.

Scott C. Cooke
District Manager

CC:

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