



Society of Vertebrate Paleontology

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FEIN: 06-0906643

February 21, 2024

U.S. Bureau of Land Management
New Mexico State Office
301 Dinosaur Trail
Santa Fe, NM 87508

Subject: Requesting for temporary suspension of remediation efforts and need for paleontological resource assessment at BLM's "Community Pit #1" near Las Cruces, New Mexico

To U.S. Bureau of Land Management – New Mexico State Office,

On behalf of the approximately 2,000 members of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP: <http://vertpaleo.org>), we are writing you today regarding the remediation efforts at BLM's "Community Pit #1" near Las Cruces, New Mexico, that are threatening scientifically significant fossiliferous beds. If you are not aware of this matter, the following article published in Ars Technica on February 8, 2024, summarizes the situation: <https://arstechnica.com/science/2024/02/in-new-mexico-the-blm-has-had-to-balance-public-safety-and-saving-fossils/>. **In particular, SVP wishes to inquire as to the status of the project and how the paleontological resource design features in the Environmental Assessment and Decision Record, particularly how BLM is protecting the scientifically significant fossils while making the area safe for the public, are being implemented.** This is a time-sensitive matter because our understanding is that the remediation efforts using explosives are approaching the fossiliferous beds, even though the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act (PRPA) of 2009 mandates BLM to protect paleontological resources on public lands managed by BLM.

SVP is a non-profit international scientific organization consisting of researchers, educators, students, and enthusiasts, to advance the science of vertebrate paleontology and to support and encourage the discovery, preservation, and protection of vertebrate fossils, fossil sites, and their geological and paleontological contexts. As described in the aforementioned Ars Technica article, the comment period for the proposed "Community Pit #1" remediation project offered around Independence Day last summer was unusually short and logistically impossible for us to be able to respond regrettably. The lack of SVP's response must not be misconstrued that SVP was not concerned about the proposed remediation plans then, and we remain deeply concerned about it.

Paleontological resources are nonrenewable and irreplaceable once destroyed. SVP is greatly concerned about the ongoing, time-sensitive situation at BLM's "Community Pit #1." If BLM cannot offer satisfactory answers to SVP's request, it would strongly suggest the need for immediately suspending the remediation process and for conducting a thorough reassessment through paleontological surveys at "Community Pit #1" by BLM's qualified paleontologists before it is too late. In fact, we encourage BLM to consider converting "Community Pit #1" showcasing traces of fossil marine organisms to something similar to, and complement well with, BLM's Prehistoric Trackways National Monument (<https://www.blm.gov/visit/ptnm>) that preserves primarily traces of terrestrial organisms.

SVP has always enthusiastically partnered with BLM and other agencies to offer professional assistance on matters relating to our mutual goals of preserving and protecting paleontological resources on federal lands, and we look forward to continuing to do so. Questions concerning our letter and comments should be addressed to any one of us or Dr. Kenshu Shimada (SVP's Government Affairs Committee) at svp@vertpaleo.org. Thank you in advance for this time-sensitive consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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