



Mr. Allen Elliott
SSFL Program Director
NASA MSFC AS01
Building 4494
Huntsville, AL 35812

Via e-mail to msfc-ssfl-eis@mail.nasa.gov

RE: Comments on Draft EIS for Demolition and Cleanup Activities at the Santa Susana Field Laboratory

Dear Mr. Elliott:

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the cleanup of NASA's portion of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL). NRDC is a national, non-profit organization of scientists, lawyers, and environmental specialists, dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC serves more than one million members, supporters and environmental activists with offices in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and Beijing. NRDC has worked on nuclear cleanup issues for over four decades, and continues to be engaged in shaping U.S. law and policy on the nuclear fuel cycle.

NRDC has been involved in the SSFL matter for nearly a quarter of a century. We were parties in nuclear proceeding over whether the "Hot Lab" should be relicensed. More recently, we were the lead plaintiff, along with the City of Los Angeles and the Committee to Bridge the Gap, in a successful lawsuit in federal court against the Department of Energy (DOE) regarding compliance of its cleanup activities with the National Environmental Policy Act. We also played a role in the 2010 adoption of the Administrative Orders on Consent (AOC) entered into by NASA and DOE with the State of California, requiring the NASA and DOE portions of SSFL to be cleaned up to background. The Draft EIS was prepared for the activities NASA is to carry out under its AOC obligations. As NASA and the Council on Environmental Quality have made clear, the EIS is to examine ways to implement the requirements of the AOC and to mitigate impacts.

NASA has repeatedly re-affirmed its commitment to the AOC, indeed, as recently as September 20, 2013. In testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Science and Technology, Associate Administrator Richard Keegan stated:

The draft EIS is open for public comment until October 1 and we expect the final EIS in November. NASA is *committed to fulfilling our obligations under the AOC*. There is sufficient funding in our FY14 request to accomplish all the activities that are planned for FY14 leading to fulfilling our commitments under the AOC. (emphasis added)

Congresswoman Julia Brownley, who represents communities near SSFL and serves on the Committee, followed up, stating, “[s]o, regardless then of what the IG may be recommending, *your commitment is still to the agreement with the AOC.*” Mr. Keegan reiterated: “We are *committed to the agreement under the AOC.*” (emphases added)

These reaffirmations of commitment to carrying out fully NASA’s obligations under the AOC are gratifying, and NRDC’s primary comment on the Draft EIS is simply to reinforce the expectation that NASA will do as promised in the AOC and its statements to Congress.

As to the draft EIS, we make the following suggestions:

- The draft EIS spends significant time on the issue of truck transportation and very little attention to the environmental issues associated with the contamination at the site that creates the need for the project in the first place. Such priorities are misplaced and should be rectified. Each and every contaminant present at the site in greater than background concentration amounts should be identified, their health effects described, the extent of the contamination for each specified, and the nature of the environmental media affected (surface soil, subsurface soil, groundwater, surface water, vegetation, buildings, etc.) described and analyzed.
- The history of violations of pollution discharge requirements should be examined, including identification of instances where limits and benchmarks for offsite migration of the pollutants were exceeded. Most important, the degree to which those limits were exceeded should be analyzed in detail.
- Health studies conducted onsite for workers and offsite for members of the public should be examined and analyzed, with special attention to any findings of potential detrimental effects from the toxic releases.
- Potential mitigation measures should be examined in substantially more detail, such as use of natural gas or electric trucks or use of rail for shipments, and plans for re-vegetation. The contaminated areas have long been degraded by NASA activities and are not pristine by any quantitative measure; once the decades of significant pollution have been addressed, thoughtful restoration plans should be commenced to attempt to restore it to the condition it was in before NASA’s activities began.
- The Draft EIS appears to consider not demolishing some of the rocket test stands and other structures and simply declaring them historical. There is no analysis of how the agency could take such action and still comply with the requirements in the AOC to clean up all soil to

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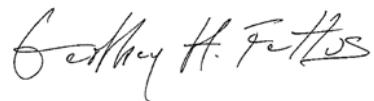
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background. Much of the contamination is centered at the test stands and the agency cannot realistically clean up the soil without getting the test stands or similar structures out of the way. The discussion of the option of leaving these structures should be removed if NASA does not have a plan for cleaning up the contamination beneath them.

In conclusion, the most important matter is that NASA should, as it has promised Congress and the public, carry out all its obligations under the AOC.

Sincerely,



Geoffrey H. Fettus
Senior Attorney
Natural Resources Defense Council
1152 15th St., NW #300
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-6868
gfettus@nrdc.org