NSF Environmental Impact Statement and Section 106 Consultation for Proposed Changes to Arecibo Observatory Operations

Arecibo Observatory Operations

What is the Proposed Action?

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is conducting scoping meetings to obtain feedback on proposed changes to operations at the Arecibo Observatory. A range of alternatives is being considered for evaluation in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). These alternatives will be refined through continued public input, with preliminary alternatives that include the following:

- Continued NSF investment for science-focused operations (No-Action Alternative)
- Collaboration with interested parties for continued science-focused operations
- Collaboration with interested parties for transition to education-focused operations
- Mothballing of facilities (suspension of operations in a manner such that operations could resume efficiently at some future date)
- Deconstruction and site restoration

What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider the potential environmental consequences of proposed actions on the environment prior to making final decisions. The NEPA review process is intended to provide the public with an opportunity to comment and provide input on those decisions. On May 23, 2016, NSF announced the beginning of the scoping process and solicitation of public comments to identify issues to be analyzed in an EIS. The purpose of the public scoping process is to determine relevant issues that will influence the scope of the environmental analysis, including identification of viable alternatives. Additional opportunities for public participation will be available throughout the process.

What is Section 106?

NSF also intends to initiate consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) to evaluate potential effects on the Arecibo Observatory, which is a historic property listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to consult with interested parties and the State Historic Preservation Officer regarding potential effects of their proposed actions on significant historic properties, such as the Arecibo Observatory.

Who owns, funds, and manages Arecibo Observatory?

NSF owns and funds the Arecibo Observatory and, as a federal agency, is therefore responsible for NEPA compliance. NSF has contracted with CH2M HILL, an environmental consultant, to prepare the EIS. SRI International, with Universities Space Research Association (USRA) and Universidad Metropolitana (UMET), receives funding from NSF via a Cooperative Agreement to operate and maintain the Arecibo Observatory for the benefit of research communities. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) provides additional funding to the Universities Space Research Association (USRA) to support solar system radar studies.

EIS Timeline

Scoping comment period: May 24 through June 23, 2016

- *Public meeting June 7, 9:30 am in San Juan*
- *Public meeting June 7, 6:00 pm in Arecibo*

Draft EIS target: Late Fall 2016

- *45-day comment period on Draft EIS*
- *Public meetings on Draft EIS*

Final EIS target: Spring 2017

NSF Record of Decision target: Summer 2017

How to Submit Comments

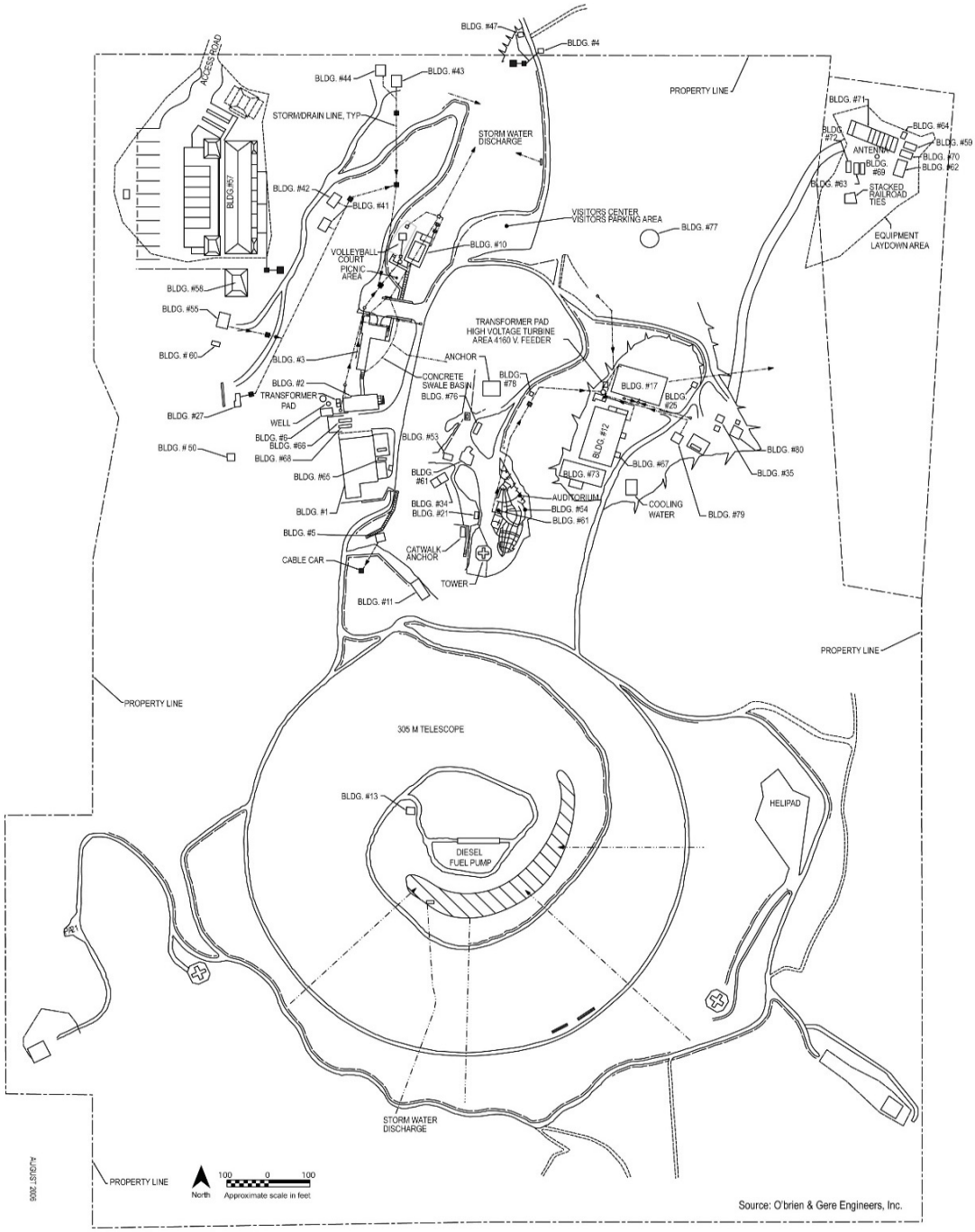
Scoping comments will be accepted through June 23, 2016 and may be submitted during the public meetings or by the following methods:

Email: Envcomp-AST@nsf.gov

Mail: Ms. Elizabeth Pentecost, National Science Foundation, Division of Astronomical Sciences, Suite 1045, 4201 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22230.

Additional information will be posted throughout the EIS process at www.nsf.gov/AST.

Site Plan



BUILDING NO. DESCRIPTION

1. OPERATIONS BUILDING
2. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
3. VISITING SCIENTIST QUARTERS AND CAFETERIA
4. ENTRANCE GUARD HOUSE
5. CABLE CAR HOUSE
6. PUMP HOUSE/WATER TREATMENT BLDG.
10. SWIMMING POOL/RESTROOMS
11. LEWIS BUILDING–RIGGING LOFT
12. MAINTENANCE SHOPS
13. BOWL SHACK
17. WAREHOUSE
21. ANTENNA TESTING RANGE
25. PAINT STORAGE BUILDING
27. OPTICAL LABS
34. HIGH VOLTAGE POWER SUPPLY BLDG.
35. CUMMINGS GENERATOR CONTROL BLDG.
41. WEST HILL V.S.Q. BACHELOR UNIT NO. 1
42. WEST HILL V.S.Q. BACHELOR UNIT NO. 2
43. WEST HILL V.S.Q. FAMILY UNIT NO. 1
44. WEST HILL V.S.Q. FAMILY UNIT NO. 2
47. MAIN GATE RESTROOM
50. INTERFERENCE MONITORING SHACK
51. GREASE PIT
53. EMERGENCY GENERATOR BLDG.
54. VISITOR CENTER BLDG.
55. LIDAR LABORATORY BLDG.
57. NORTH V.S.Q. BLDG.
58. NORTH V.S.Q. UTILITY BLDG.
59. VISITOR CENTER TRAILER
60. ANT. RECE. TESTING BLDG.
61. LEARNING CENTER
62. HFF STORAGE TRAILER
63. IONOSONDE TRAILER
64. ELECTRONIC TRAILER
65. SHIELDED TRAILER
66. ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE TRAILER
67. CRYOGENICS LAB TRAILER
68. SCIENTIFIC OFFICES TRAILER
69. ELECTRONIC TRAILER (WAVEGUIDE)
70. COMPUTER TRAILER
71. ELECTRONICS CABLE TRAILER
72. ELECTRONIC TRAILER (CRYOGENICS)
73. HF TRANSMITTER BUILDING
76. INSPIRATION FOR SCIENCE TRAILER
77. PHASE REFERENCE ANTENNA (12M)
78. COFFEE HUT
79. ENGINEERING OFFICE BUILDING
80. CUMMINGS DIESEL GENERATOR BUILDING