

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22314



Ms. Barbara Zook, Architectural Projects Reviewer
New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, Historic Preservation Division
407 Galisteo Street, Suite 236
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

October 31, 2017

RE: Section 106 Assessment of Effects for the Proposed Changes to Sacramento Peak
Observatory Operations, Sunspot, Otero County, New Mexico
HPD Log Nos.: 103900, 104236, 105254 and 105751

Dear Ms. Zook,

The National Science Foundation (NSF) Directorate for Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Division of Astronomical Sciences has identified the need to divest several facilities from its portfolio to retain the balance of capabilities needed to deliver the best performance on key science of the present decade and beyond. The Sacramento Peak Observatory in Sunspot, Otero County, New Mexico, is one of the facilities identified for divestment.

The decision regarding the potential changes to the Sacramento Peak Observatory is considered a federal undertaking and triggers compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). While engaging in Section 106 consultation under the NHPA, NSF is simultaneously producing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to identify potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed changes to operations.

NSF formally initiated Section 106 consultation with your office on August 24, 2016. The consultation letter included information regarding the location, background, and proposed Alternatives. Section 106 consultation is ongoing, and NSF has worked closely with your office to come to an agreement regarding the Area of Potential Effects (APE) and the historic district boundaries for the Observatory property. NSF is also coordinating closely with the US Forest Service staff, since the Observatory is located on National Forest System lands.

The Sacramento Peak Observatory is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as a historic district with 63 contributing resources. Under proposed Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4, historic properties that contribute to the NRHP-eligible historic district could be demolished. Therefore, NSF has determined that any of the proposed Alternatives for this undertaking would result in a finding of adverse effect under Section 106. The proposed Alternatives are summarized as follows:

Proposed Action Alternatives

Alternative 1 – Continued Science and Education-focused Operations by Interested Parties with Reduced NSF Funding

Alternative 2 – Transition to Partial Operations by Interested Parties with Reduced NSF Funding

Alternative 3 – Mothballing of Facilities

Alternative 4 – Demolition and Site Restoration

With this letter, NSF is enclosing the *Proposed Changes to Sacramento Peak Observatory Operations: Historic Properties Assessment of Effects* (CH2M HILL, 2017) for your review and comment. We will also provide a copy of this report to the single consulting party that has been identified for this undertaking.

In compliance with Title 36 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Part 800.6(a), NSF invites you to continue consultation to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the adverse effect to historic properties through development of a Programmatic Agreement. NSF recommends a Programmatic Agreement under 36 CFR 800.14(b)(1)(ii) because the effects on historic properties cannot be fully determined prior to approval of the undertaking on the proposed changes to Sacramento Peak Observatory operations.

We respectfully request your review and comments on the Assessment of Effects report within 30 calendar days of your receipt of this letter. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Elizabeth Pentecost by phone at 703-292-4907, email at epenteco@nsf.gov, or U.S. Postal Service to NSF, Division of Astronomical Sciences, 2415 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314.

We look forward to further consultation with you on this undertaking.

Regards,



Caroline M. Blanco
Federal Preservation Officer
Assistant General Counsel
National Science Foundation

Cc: William Sapp, U.S. Forest Service (via email)
Mark Klaene, Apache Point Observatory

Enclosure:

Proposed Changes to Sacramento Peak Observatory Operations: Historic Properties Assessment of Effects

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*Proposed Changes to Sacramento Peak Observatory Operations:
Historic Properties Assessment of Effects*