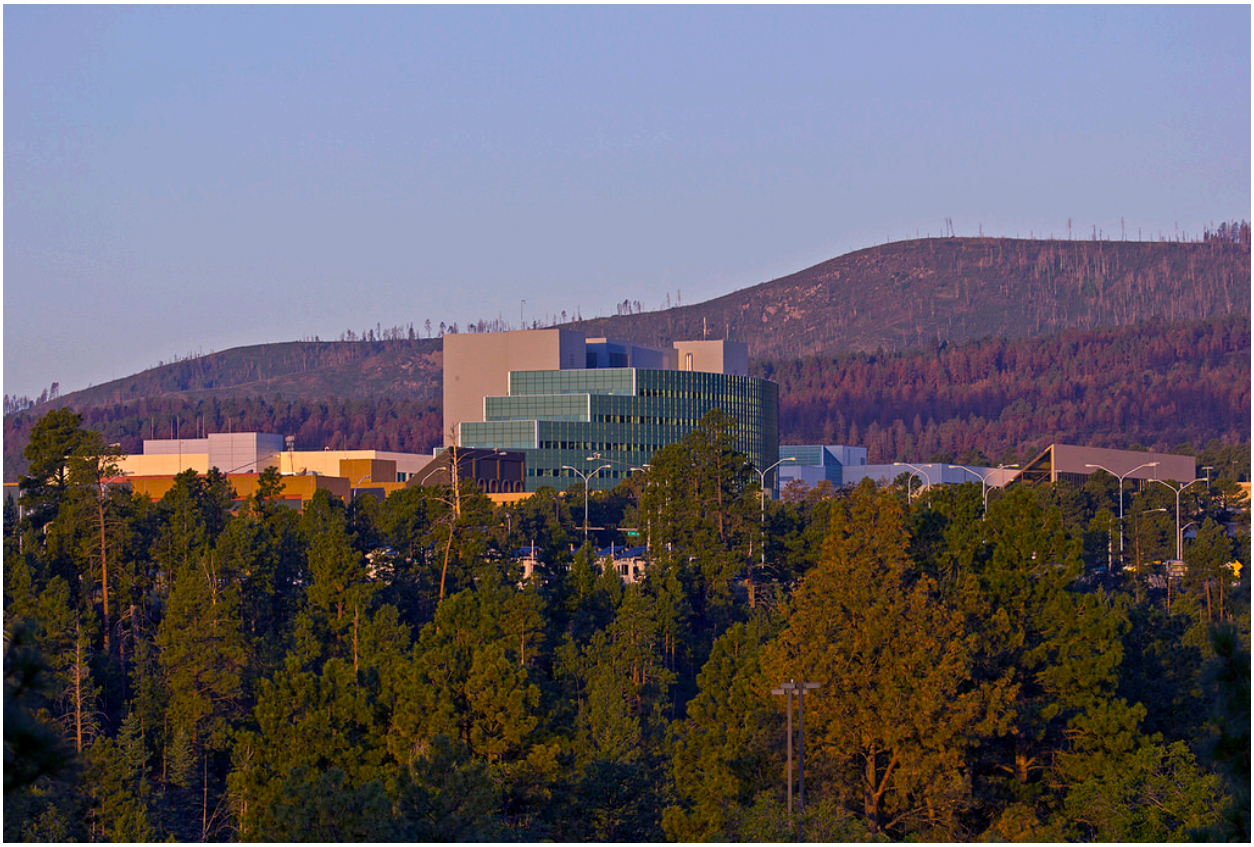
LANL completes high-priority flood and erosion control work

July 11, 2011



Waste removed from canyon bottom

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, July 11, 2011— Los Alamos National Laboratory work crews over the weekend installed 600 feet of water diversion barriers and removed more than 1,200 cubic yards of sediment in anticipation of flash flooding because of damage from the Las Conchas Fire.It's the first phase of additional work to help stabilize canyons that run through LANL property and minimize the ability of flood waters to stir up trace levels of Cold War-era contaminants in canyon bottoms.Although the fire burned only one acre of Lab property, it charred parts of two major canyons upstream. The lack of vegetation and a water-repelling crust on the burned areas could allow storm water to rush down-canyon instead of soak in."There is little doubt that we will see ash in the water reaching the Rio Grande," said Dave McInroy, program director for the Lab's flood and erosion control efforts. "This is what you'd expect after any fire in New Mexico. We're working to minimize the transport of any contaminants

that have attached to sediments in the canyon bottoms.”The Lab also planned for quick turnarounds on results from dozens of storm water sampling stations—results that will then be posted to RACER, a publicly available Internet database of environmental data from LANL and the New Mexico Environment Department. Also over the weekend, the Lab

- removed 65 containers of waste soils and debris from environmental investigation sites in canyon bottoms
- removed tanks containing more than 5,000 gallons of water from drilling operations associated with monitoring wells
- placed concrete barriers to divert water from sediment collection ponds at the bottom of Los Alamos Canyon
- sealed wells in canyon bottoms to prevent flood waters from leaking into the wells
- added storm water samplers along the Lab’s eastern boundary.

“This is our highest priority right now,” said Kevin Smith, manager of the National Nuclear Security Administration’s Los Alamos Site Office. “We had employees work through the weekend, and the Lab has finished this first phase three days sooner than expected.”The recent actions come in addition to hundreds of projects and actions since the 2000 Cerro Grande fire, including the massive Pajarito flood-control structure, earth berms, rock dams, and a wetland stabilized by thousands of new willows. All are aimed at protecting the environment and inhibiting the flow of sediments down-canyon.Three key LANL storm water gauges that support Santa Fe’s public water utility suffered no damage in the fire. The gauges connect wirelessly to the utility’s control room, allowing operators to stop diverting Rio Grande water if they choose. The gauges also take water samples at preset intervals during a flood.Investigation or cleanup of Cold War-era waste sites is taking place under the Consent Order, a 2005 agreement between the Department of Energy, LANL, and the state of New Mexico. Of more than 2,100 sites in existence in 2005, about 800 remain, ranging in size from a small, suspected fuel spill to multi-acre landfills. None of the large sites is in a canyon bottom.