

Military study looks at area needs

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A sweeping land-use plan involving communities near Department of Defense operations throughout Socorro and neighboring counties is coming to fruition.

Between the counties of Dona Aña, Socorro, Sierra, Otero, Lincoln, and El Paso, Texas, the Southern New Mexico-El Paso Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) has conducted meetings in order to better understand the needs and issues of communities that are near military bases and operations.

The largest and most prevalent to Socorro of these entities is White Sands Missile Range, but the study is not limited to just that.

“The whole intent of the JLUS is to identify and coordinate the needs of communities that surround military bases, what are the needs and concerns of the military and the needs and concerns and resources of the surrounding communities,” said Socorro County Manager Delilah Walsh, who is also part of the technical and policy committees for the study.

In order to strategize with the communities, public forums have been hosted in regard to current issues that could ultimately affect certain areas. A JLUS public meeting was held Oct. 8 in the San Antonio community.

According to the study’s website, officials hope to start implementing the plan after November in some areas.

In Socorro, one project of interest is the transmission line of SunZia solar and wind energy that is to be constructed through a large portion of the county. Recently, SunZia came to an agreement with WSMR in order to construct the line without lobbying to temporarily interfere with missile testing and other military exercises.

As the JLUS is supported by military grants, its primary goal is to look at the military needs in the area. For Socorro, this especially looks at the Northern extension area that is filled with ranchers who own and lease land in the area.

Walsh said another example of looking at the military’s use of county roads also is a factor in determining how to maintain them in the near future.

“One of the more complex issues is communication with broadband issues and radio communications,” Walsh said. “There are activities that can interrupt communication needs, as well as identifying wildfires over radio, good water resource use, sustainable energy use.”

Socorro will look to have a memorandum of action committee with a liaison office with Dona Aña County, Walsh said.

Over the last two years, the JLUS has been trying to establish better lines of communication with military interest in the area and their constituents.

“It’s really this giant schedule of things that were identified,” Walsh said. “The impactful part is the implementation of a committee to make sure that we communicate with the military and make sure they’re a part of our study plans and that we are a part of theirs.”

Before this plan, there were no official agreements between local and military interests as far as development and procedure.

“There was no formal structure to say ‘This is how the county works with WSMR and this is how we work with Holloman (Air Force Base),’ Walsh said, adding the county has made commitments to make sure it is part of the Air Force base’s future implementation programs and vice versa.

For more information on the study, visit www.snmejointlanduse.com.