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CERRO GRANDE FIRE ASSESSMENT PROJECT: An Assessment of the Impact of the Cerro Grande Fire on Cultural Resources at Los Alamos National Laboratory, New Mexico

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Cerro Grande Fire Assessment Project: An Assessment of the Impact of the Cerro Grande Fire on Cultural Resources at Los Alamos National Laboratory, New Mexico

by

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ABSTRACT

This report represents nearly two years of the Cerro Grande Fire Assessment (CGFA) Project. The project included the survey and assessment of cultural resources at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), New Mexico, the need for which was brought about by the Cerro Grande Fire in May of 2000.

On May 4, 2000, the National Park Service ignited a controlled burn on the summit of Cerro Grande Peak in the Bandelier National Monument. That night, strong winds blew the fire out of control, and on 5 May the controlled burn was officially declared a wildfire. The town of Los Alamos and surrounding communities were quickly evacuated as the fire moved dangerously close to homes. As wind speeds increased and fire fighters were unable to impede the progress of the fire, it continued to grow and rage uncontrollably. The Cerro Grande Fire was not contained until 6 June, more than one month after it had started.

A total of 47,650 acres was consumed by the Cerro Grande Fire, and more than 200 structures in the town of Los Alamos and 100 structures on LANL land were damaged or destroyed. Also, a wide variety of LANL projects and scientific records were destroyed in the fire. When the fire was finally contained, it had caused more than one billion dollars in damage. Four hundred and eighty archaeological sites, both ancient and historic, were located within the burn area. Cultural Resources Management Team archaeologists assessed 470 of the sites and found fire related damage to 340 of them. This report details the damage to these sites and the subsequent mitigation and rehabilitation resulting from the CGFA Project.

While the causes, nature, chronology, and consequences of the Cerro Grande Fire have been well documented in a number of reports (DOE 2000; LANL 2000, 2001a, 2001b). The impacts of the fire on the cultural resources of LANL and other agencies are just beginning to be understood and summarized (e.g., Masse et al. 2001); our volume is a contribution to this task.