**Department of Energy**
**Idaho Operations Office**
1955 Fremont Avenue
Idaho Falls, ID 83415

July 24, 2025

**Subject:** U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM AT IDAHO NATIONAL LABORATORY (DOE/EA-2297)

**Agency:** U.S. Department of Energy

**Action:** Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

**Summary:** The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has developed an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed Wildland Fire (WLF) Management Program at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) Site.

Currently, DOE's fire management and recovery options at the INL Site are limited to those actions analyzed in the 2003 Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory Wildland Fire Management EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (DOE-ID 2003). New strategies are necessary to enhance firefighter safety, asset protection, and the recovery of natural resources following WLF events at the INL Site. The proposed WLF Management Program analyzed in the 2025 EA addresses the increasing risk of large wildland fires that threaten human life, property, and ecological resources.

Under the proposed action, activities evaluated in the 2003 Wildland Fire Management EA would continue. The program would implement additional prevention activities, maintain fire management infrastructure, and enact recovery efforts following a WLF. Specifically, it includes improving approximately 130 miles of two-track roads to graveled and spot-graded roads suitable for firefighter access and egress and placing about 152,000 cubic yards of pit run gravel without widening beyond existing widths. Additionally, DOE proposes mowing up to 100 feet on each side of certain improved roads (200 ft total). This mowing would occur along approximately 80 miles of the improved roads and mow roughly 2100 acres of vegetation down to 6 inches.

The proposed action analyzed in the EA also includes a formal WLF recovery plan to rehabilitate burned areas following WLF events. The INL Site Natural Resources Wildland Fire Recovery Framework provides an adaptive management approach with options for soil stabilization, erosion control, cheatgrass and noxious weed control, recovery of native herbaceous vegetation, and sagebrush habitat restoration.

Based on the impact analysis of the proposed action, any potential impact associated with these activities would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required, and a FONSI is appropriate.

DOE also analyzed a "No Action" alternative in the EA. Under the no action alternative, DOE would continue to manage WLF activities in accordance with the 2003 WLF EA and FONSI. The consequences of the no-action alternative serve as a baseline, enabling decision-makers to compare the magnitude of environmental effects of the proposed action alternative.

**Purpose and Need:** DOE recognizes the necessity to enhance fire preparedness and recovery strategies at the INL Site. DOE fire management and recovery options at the INL Site are currently limited to those that were analyzed in the 2003 WLF EA and FONSI (DOE-ID 2003). New strategies are necessary to allow WLF protection strategies and recovery efforts that can offer improved asset protection, firefighter safety, and recovery of natural resources following WLF events on the INL Site.

**Analysis:** To determine whether the Proposed Action could cause significant environmental effects, the EA analyzed the potential impacts of the proposal on human and natural resources and presented them in Section 3, "Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences." The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

**Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases**
The proposed action involves road improvements and mowing activities at the INL Site, which are expected to generate some fugitive emissions, including fine particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10). These emissions are estimated to be below significant regulatory levels, with PM2.5 emissions at 0.52 tons per year and PM10 being roughly 2.51 tons per year. Overall, the increase in emissions is considered minor and will not significantly impact air quality. Combustion emissions from mobile vehicles used in the proposed action are also estimated to be well below the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reporting threshold. The minor increase in emissions is expected to result in a negligible contribution to cumulative impacts on air quality. The overall impact on air quality and GHGs is considered negligible. The No Action Alternative will maintain current air quality conditions without new measures to control emissions, but the potential for increased emissions from uncontrolled wildfires remains.

**Water**
The EA analyzed the potential impacts of the proposed action on water resources, focusing on groundwater use and surface water quality. The proposed action will use approximately 153,000 gallons of water for dust suppression, which is only about 0.02% of the total water used at INL in 2023. This minor increase will not violate water quality standards or significantly alter existing drainage patterns. Potential impacts to surface water are considered low due to the infrequent presence of surface water sources at the INL Site. Best Management Practices (BMPs), such as silt fencing and erosion control measures, will be implemented to minimize any potential impacts. The application of herbicides will be conducted according to manufacturer

recommendations to avoid contamination of surface waters. The proposed action will have minimal impacts on water resources, with negligible changes in groundwater use and low potential impacts on surface water quality. The No Action Alternative will maintain current conditions without additional water use or improvements, but the risk of degradation from uncontrolled events may persist.

**Soil and Geology**
The EA evaluated the impacts of road maintenance and soil disturbances on soil and geological resources. The proposed action involves disturbing soil along approximately 80 miles of existing roads, which may lead to temporary erosion. However, the use of BMPs, such as silt fencing, hay bales, and revegetation efforts, will help minimize soil erosion and protect soil integrity. The transition to graveled roads will not expand existing borrow pits, resulting in minimal geological impact. Additionally, the proposed action includes measures to stabilize disturbed soils and prevent erosion, such as recontouring and revegetating disturbed areas. Thus, the proposed action will have minor, temporary impacts on soil and geological resources. The No Action Alternative will leave current conditions unchanged, with ongoing risks of erosion from natural events.

**Ecological**
The EA evaluated the ecological effects of mowing and road improvements. The project will impact around 2,100 acres of vegetation, including essential sagebrush. This may elevate noxious weed risks and change habitat quality. However, measures like sagebrush restoration and BMPs aim to mitigate these impacts and aid ecosystem recovery. The plan includes controlling noxious weeds through chemical methods and planting native species, improving firefighter safety and access, which can reduce wildfire severity and benefit the ecosystem. The action is expected to have moderate ecological impacts, while the No Action Alternative will maintain ongoing risks without new management strategies.

**Noise**
The EA considered the noise impacts of mechanical equipment used for mowing and other activities. The proposed action will generate noise levels between 80-100 dBA, consistent with existing operations. The use of personal protective equipment will mitigate impacts on operators. Given the distance to offsite receptors, cumulative noise impacts are expected to be negligible. The proposed action will not cause a significant change in the noise environment at the INL Site, and any noise generated will be temporary and localized. The No Action Alternative will maintain existing noise conditions without significant changes.

**Cultural**
The EA evaluated the potential impacts of road improvements and mowing on cultural resources. These activities may disturb archaeological sites and historic properties. However, measures such as geotextile fabric and cultural resource awareness training will help avoid significant impacts. The proposed action aims to stabilize roadbeds and improve emergency access, reducing wildfire risks to cultural sites. The EA also includes a framework for National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 review to ensure that any potential impacts on historic properties are identified and mitigated. Cultural resource impacts from the proposed activities are expected

to be minor. The No Action Alternative will leave cultural resources at risk without enhanced protection.

**Reasonably Foreseeable Cumulative Impacts**
The quantitative and qualitative impacts to the critical resource areas from implementing the proposed action were individually insignificant. Additive impacts from implementing the proposed action to those manifested from past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects or programs on and adjacent to the INL were evaluated and determined to be insignificant.

**Determination:** Based on its analysis and public comments received on the EA, DOE has determined that the Proposed Action to Implement the INL WLF Management Program is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.). Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. DOE is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action concluding the NEPA process for this action.

DOE has considered the factors mandated by NEPA; that the environmental assessment represents DOE's good-faith effort to prioritize documentation of the most important considerations required by the statute within the Congressionally mandated page limits; that this prioritization reflects DOE's expert judgment; and that any considerations addressed briefly or left unaddressed were, in DOE's judgment, comparatively not of a substantive nature that meaningfully informed the consideration of environmental effects and the resulting decision.

Mitigation is not necessary to render the impacts of this action not significant.

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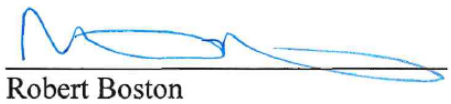

Robert Boston
Manager

Copies of the EA and FONSI are available from: Danielle Miller, Office of Communications, Idaho Operations Office, U.S. Department of Energy, 1955 Fremont Avenue, Idaho Falls, ID 83415, or by calling 208-526-5709

For further information on the NEPA process contact: Doug Herzog, NEPA Compliance Officer, U.S. Department of Energy, 1955 Fremont Avenue, Idaho Falls, ID 83415, or by calling (208) 244-9465.