

## WM2017 Conference Panel Report

### PANEL SESSION 106: Engaging the Public Through Interpretation at Legacy Sites

**Co-Chairs:** **Padraic Benson**, *US DOE*  
**Jeannette Hyatt**, *Savannah River National Laboratory, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions*

**Panel Reporter:** **Judy Connell**, *Fluor Corporation*

#### Panelists

1. **Dr. April Gil**, *Grand Junction Office Manager, US DOE, Office of Legacy Management*
2. **Susan Smiley**, *Site Manager, US DOE, Office of Legacy Management*
3. **Tracy Atkins**, *Principal Representative, Manhattan Project National Historical Park, US DOE*
4. **Dr. Amy Fitzgerald**, *Energy Communities Alliance*

#### Summary of Presentations

**Dr. April Gil** kicked off the panel with a presentation entitled “Past, Present, and Future: From the Manhattan Project to the Grand Junction Legacy Learning Center,” providing an overview of the Manhattan Engineering District’s (MED) Grand Junction Office that was established in March 1943. During World War II, Grand Junction, Colorado was the center of the Manhattan Project’s secret effort to find and refine uranium ore in the Colorado Plateau. The uranium was first extracted from existing waste (tailings) from vanadium mines. The Atomic Energy Commission (predecessor to the DOE) supported uranium exploration and sponsored a uranium purchase program, spurring the “Uranium Boom or the “Atomic Rush,” 1947-1962. The MED operated a refinery at Grand Junction to concentrate uranium oxide, or “yellowcake.” About 14% of the uranium used by the Manhattan Project was from ore acquired by personnel working at Grand Junction, concentrated on site, and shipped to other Manhattan Project facilities in Tonawanda, New York; Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Hanford, Washington; and Los Alamos, New Mexico, for further refinement, enrichment, and incorporation into test devices and the bombs to end World War II. The office complex is also nationally significant as a Cold-War-era facility from 1947 to 1970, when Grand Junction served as the center for uranium ore prospecting, mining, and concentration for the production of America’s nuclear military arsenal and for the domestic nuclear industry. Past milling activities contaminated the groundwater in the alluvial aquifer beneath the site. All surface contamination had been removed by 2013, but groundwater contamination still remains. The DOE Office of Legacy Management (LM) is responsible for ensuring that the Grand Junction processing site selected groundwater compliance strategy remains protective of human health and the environment. The Grand Junction office compound was put on the national registry of historic places on June 26, 2016.

The centerpiece of the Grand Junction Atomic Energy Learning Center is the iconic “cabin,” which has been in continuous use since 1943. The purpose of the Center will be to preserve societal knowledge of the past and educate and encourage students to pursue science and engineering careers. The Center’s grand opening will be the summer of 2018.

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**Sue Smiley** spoke about two “learning centers” in Ohio: one at Fernald about 20 miles northwest of Cincinnati, and the second known as the Mound site, about 10 miles southwest of Dayton. The Visitor Center at the Fernald Preserve was completed in August 2008. The Center began as a warehouse that was redesigned in cooperation with the University of Cincinnati’s College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning. The Visitor Center was the first building in Ohio to receive Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system, the nationally accepted standard for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance green buildings. The push for the Preserve and Visitor Center came from the stakeholders. “The stakeholders have been involved in the process from the very beginning. Their input has been crucial,” said **Smiley**. The Preserve has seven miles of hiking trails and the Visitor Center houses current information about the site as well as exhibits that present the site’s history. While the Fernald facilities have been open since 2008, the Mound Cold War Discovery Center is under development. DOE signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Dayton History (a 501.c.3 organization); the Mound Science & Energy Museum (also a 501.c.3); and Mound Development Corporation (MDC), who owns the current Mound Science & Energy Museum (MSEM). Under the MOA, 1) Dayton History is the lead for the project that will include remodeling the current Museum; design, fabrication, and installation of the exhibits, and start up and initial operations of the facility; 2) MDC will maintain the facility, grounds, and parking; 3) MSEM provides artifacts and subject-matter experts to review and develop new exhibits; 4) and DOE funds (2 years of capital build up and 5 years of operation) and is intimately involved in the remodel of the facility, design of the exhibits and facility operation. Total cost is estimated at \$1.8 million. The exhibits have been designed and construction is anticipated to be complete in September 2017. Ribbon cutting is scheduled for October 2017.

**Tracy Atkins**’ presentation focused on the Manhattan Project National Historic Park tracing its beginning back to support and activism from residents in Oak Ridge, TN; Los Alamos, NM; and Hanford, WA. Based on a 2004 Congressional directive to perform a Special Resources Study, the National Park Service held site visits and open houses in each of these communities. (Dayton was originally included in the Study but did not meet the requirements for a National Park.) In 2010, the three primary sites were recommended, and in December 2014, the creation of the National Park was authorized in joint management with DOE.

A Scholars Forum was held in November 2015 to provide input to Park interpretation, and in November 2015, DOE and the Department of the Interior signed an MOA establishing the Park and defining the joint-management protocol.

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The purpose of the Park is to preserve and interpret the nationally significant historic sites, stories, and legacies associated with the top-secret race to develop an atomic weapon during World War II, and provide access to these sites consistent with DOE's mission. In 2016, visitor contact stations were set up in each community, and the web sites and brochures were all in place. DOE's staffing is complete and the National Park Service has a permanent superintendent and acting site representatives. The Oak Ridge site includes a Visitor Center at the American Museum of Science & Energy, and includes tours of the Graphite Reactor at the X-10 facility, the Y-12 New Hope Center, and the site of the K-25 gaseous diffusion plant. The Los Alamos Visitor Center is currently in downtown Los Alamos and Los Alamos provides the space at no cost. There are walking tours of the historic district that includes Fuller Lodge. The B Reactor on the Hanford site is the focus of the Hanford Visitor Center. In addition to exhibits, trained docents provide commentary throughout the B Reactor, including a discussion in front of the open face of the reactor. Overall visitation at the three locations topped 90,000 in 2016. Strategic goals for the next 5 years include collaborating with passionate partners and volunteers and enhancing the visitor experience.

**Dr. Amy Fitzgerald** continued the discussion about the Manhattan Project National Park from the perspective of the Energy Communities Alliance (ECA). The ECA, established in the early 1990s to enhance the role of local governments in DOE's cleanup program, has been focused on historical preservation and National Park Service issues for nearly 20 years. **Dr. Fitzgerald** discussed details of recent activities at the three sites. At Oak Ridge, the K-25 Historical Center is in final design and the City of Oak Ridge has begun the International Friendship Bell Peace Pavilion Project. The latter, being built in cooperation with Japan, will house the International Friendship Bell that honors Japan/U.S. relationships and will be a unique feature of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. At Hanford, 2016 marked the transfer of the complete collection of artifacts to Washington State University (WSU), a concert of the Mid-Columbia Mastersingers in the B Reactor building, and an REI Bike Tri-Cities Centennial Bike Ride through select portions of the site. For Los Alamos, the Los Alamos History Museum was reopened on December 30, 2016, sporting a redesigned facility and new exhibits. The Fuller Lodge was also reopened after a \$4M multi-phase renovation. Other activities at Los Alamos include expanded Park ranger-led programs, the installation of public WiFi and new historic signs, enhanced public access, and additional preservation/restoration work.