



Ambitious cleanup project helps protect threatened wildlife

Restoring contaminated resources is a prime mission of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). That is happening in a big way near Beaumont in Riverside County, where for more than 20 years the Department has been overseeing the cleanup of about 11,000 acres polluted from decades-ago rocket and weapons testing to, among other things, benefit wildlife.

Lockheed Martin no longer owns the bulk of the property, but the company is responsible for the cleanup of portions of Potrero and Laborde canyons. Rockets were assembled and tested (including those used in the Apollo moon missions) in these rolling hills and valleys in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, leaving behind a host of contaminants.

These sites operated during the Cold War, and much of the work was classified. The owners required large expanses of land to keep prying eyes away. The two sites are about five miles apart, and the remediation is the result of Consent Orders in 1989 and 1991. Risk of public exposure has been low because the property is isolated.

Daniel K. Zogaib has been the DTSC project manager on this project for years. The remediation is important, he said, because it goes to the heart of environmental protection.

“This cleanup will not only remove toxic chemicals from the soil and groundwater,” he said, “But it also is vital for proposed recreational uses, a wildlife corridor and for protecting the [Stephens’ Kangaroo Rat](#), an endangered species in the region.”

Lockheed Martin retained ownership of 565 acres in Portero Canyon where most of the groundwater contamination was discovered. The state bought the rest of the site, near Interstate 10, in 2003 for eventual use as wildlife habitat and compatible recreational uses. Lockheed Martin’s environmental consultant, Tetra Tech, describes Portero Canyon as “hilly, with associated drainages, riparian areas and valley bottoms.”

Riverside County purchased much of Laborde Canyon near 60 Freeway in 2007 for a landfill expansion and wildlife corridor.

Previous cleanups led to the removal of thousands of tons of contaminated soil and treatment of millions of gallons of groundwater in both sites. Now, final remediation is in sight, said Zogaib.

The public review and comment period started on September 30, 2015 and ends on November 16, 2015 on proposals to use a mixed bag of cleanup methods, including removing contaminated soil, treating soil and off-site, land-use restrictions and capping affected areas. Those remedies should be in place and fully operating by 2018.



Stephen's Kangaroo Rat