

106 SUCCESS STORY

Commitment to Balancing Centuries- Old Heritage with 21st Century Use

Sierra County, New Mexico



“The connection from Mexico’s distant past to humans in space exists along the historically significant road called El Camino Real. From the beginning, federal and state agencies consulted with citizens on programming, design, and construction to ensure this 21st century project would be sensitive to the 16th century trail. Spaceport America continues to respect and represent our rich New Mexico heritage and culture while providing a launch site for future space travel.”

—BILL RICHARDSON
Former New Mexico Governor

Photos: Above, Spaceport America hosts rocket events like this one open to the public (iStockphoto © SWInsider); Right, landscape view of the facility (courtesy Spaceport America, New Mexico)



THE STORY

For centuries, a trade route connecting central Mexico with current day New Mexico supplied Native Americans with important trade goods. In 1598, Juan de Oñate received permission from the King of Spain to conduct the first expedition to establish a colony in Spain’s northernmost province using this ancient trail, which would come to be known as El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (El Camino). From 1598 to 1881, El Camino was the principal link for colonists, explorers, and traders connecting Mexico City and Santa Fe. Relying on pack trains and wagons that could not cross the arroyos west of the Rio Grande or the mountainous terrain east of it, Spanish expeditions used a shortcut known as La Jornada Del Muerto (La Jornada) along the last 100 miles of the 1,457-mile-long route.

Managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), New Mexico State Land Office (SLO), and private ranchers, La Jornada has remained devoid of development since the end of activity on El Camino. El Camino, including La Jornada, was designated a National Historic Trail in 2000 and listed in the National Register in 2010.

THE PROJECT

In 2003, the state of New Mexico proposed construction of the world’s first purpose-built commercial space vehicle launch facility on 18,000 acres along La Jornada. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-licensed spaceport would be constructed on SLO land west and adjacent to White Sands Missile Range and BLM-managed land. Named “Spaceport America,” it was envisioned to accommodate both vertical and horizontal launch space vehicles, serve as a base for pre-flight and post-flight activities, and encourage spectator visitation and economic development.

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Photos: From left, runway and terminal (courtesy Spaceport America, New Mexico); BLM sign at Truth or Consequences, New Mexico (iStockphoto © SWInsider)

THE 106 PROCESS

FAA, the federal agency licensing this project, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires federal agencies to identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they license, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur. FAA and the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer identified a number of adverse effects from the proposed project: visual intrusion on the National Historic Trail including daylight visibility and nighttime lighting; disturbance of the quiet, isolated atmosphere of the trail experience; potential for increased pedestrian and vehicular traffic; destruction of archaeological sites by facility and utility corridor construction, and potential disturbance of archaeological sites during operations.

FAA used Section 106 consultation to engage a diverse group of interested parties in developing a Programmatic Agreement (PA) to guide the project. The PA established the Spaceport America Planning and Design Advisory Committee to incorporate design elements that were sensitive to cultural elements of El Camino. The plans included a low-profile structure designed with sloped elevations to break up sight lines using natural colors, berms, and vegetative screening to minimize visibility. The facility's design and construction were oriented parallel with existing natural ground contours. All energy distribution lines were underground consistent with the goal of minimal visual impact. A detailed construction management and protection plan for the archaeological resources included cultural resources sensitivity training for a large workforce. Mitigation plans developed under the PA addressed other effects to archaeological sites and El Camino and resulted in archival study and mapping of trail traces adding to what was already known about the history of the trail.

THE SUCCESS

The Spaceport America project illustrates the value of early consultation in order to achieve harmony between a very modern project and a vast cultural landscape. Programming, design, and construction were sensitive to the undeveloped natural conditions of the area. The design incorporated green technologies and approaches to minimize potential environmental impacts to ensure the project blended with its natural and cultural surroundings. When FAA renewed Spaceport's license in 2013, the PA was amended so its provisions could continue to guide construction and operation activities as they relate to historic properties. Commitment to be respectful and representative of the rich New Mexico heritage and culture has been leveraged into formulating the overall vision for Spaceport America.

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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Consulting Parties:

Federal Aviation Administration
 ACHP
 New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer
 New Mexico Spaceport Authority
 National Park Service
 Bureau of Land Management
 New Mexico State Land Office
 National Aeronautics and Space Administration
 White Sands Missile Range
 New Mexico Department of Transportation
 Sierra County
 National Trust for Historic Preservation
 New Mexico Heritage Preservation Alliance
 El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro Trail Association
 Dennis Wallin (representative of private property owners)
 Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
 Comanche Tribe
 Hopi Tribe

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov



Preserving America's Heritage