

El Malpais reclaims sandstone quarry

Students from New Mexico Highlands University kicked off a large-scale project last April to reclaim an abandoned sandstone mine at El Malpais National Monument when they salvaged 150 plants for later use in revegetating the disturbed site. The 5-acre quarry, which is located in the southeast portion of the park, was a safety hazard and blemish in the scenic landscape. The park spent nearly a year planning the project, which involves the help of the NPS Geologic Resources Division and Southwest Support Office, U.S. Army Reserve, the university, and other partners.

In July, Army Reserve engineering units from Santa Fe and Albuquerque began moving earth to reduce the 30-foot high walls of the quarry and recontour the pit to blend in with the surrounding area. The same crews also constructed a way-

side exhibit and viewing area for McCarty's Crater and the distant chain of craters, important volcanic features of the park. Additional park improvements were undertaken at the same time and include construction of a road to an existing trailhead (Lava Falls), removal of an eroding road, and removal of water impoundments.

The project has been very cost-effective for the National Park Service, and all partners have benefitted from the experience. The NPS Geologic Resources Division funded on-site technical support for the earthmoving phase of the project and paid for diesel fuel for the heavy equipment. The Army Reserve donated staff time and equipment in exchange for a practical field training exercise. The students, who

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An Army Reserve bulldozer recontours the sandstone quarry at El Malpais National Monument

collected plants from the site for later use in the revegetation phase, receive credit to meet undergraduate degree requirements in biology and environmental science and management. Some of the materials used in preserving the native plants were donated by a local company, Santa Fe Greenhouses. Revegetation will be completed this fall and topsoil will be added to the quarry next spring.