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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Fischmann **ORIGINAL DATE** 01/25/10
LAST UPDATED _____ **HB** _____
SHORT TITLE National Solar Observatory **SJM** 18
ANALYST Haug

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY10	FY11		
	NFI	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Higher Education Department (HED)

New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NMIMT)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Joint Memorial 18 request that the Legislature express its support for the consolidation of National Solar Observatory staff to New Mexico and that it encourage efforts to maximize the benefits of the consolidation to the National Solar Observatory and the people of New Mexico.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

NMIMT states that the National Science Foundation will issue a call for proposals that will identify funding for this project from the National Science Foundation and not require any state general fund monies.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The main facility of the national solar observatory is currently located in Sunspot, New Mexico.

A call for proposals from the national science foundation to consolidate the national solar observatory scientific and engineering staff to a single university campus is expected to be issued in early 2010.

New Mexico state university, the university of New Mexico and the New Mexico institute of mining and technology desire to retain the national solar observatory within the state and to have New Mexico state university host it on its Las Cruces campus.

New Mexico state university's science, engineering and mathematics departments and its physical science laboratory will directly benefit from interactions with the national solar observatory as it will allow for better recruitment of excellent faculty, increase the quality of education for graduate and undergraduate students and accommodate joint research programs between New Mexico's universities and the national solar observatory.

There is a potential that one hundred jobs could be created in Dona Ana county with a yearly labor income impact of six million dollars (\$6,000,000).

These high-paying jobs will not be created in New Mexico unless a compelling state response to the anticipated national science foundation call for proposals is constructed.

Other groups will aggressively seek to relocate the national solar observatory to their states.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

NMIMT reports that that the National Science Foundation is expected to make a call for proposals in early 2010 to consolidate the national solar observatory scientific and engineering staff to a single university campus and via this memorial the desire is to respond to the proposal citing New Mexico State University as the host site.

The HED notes:

According to Rex Hunter, the NSO Administrative Manager, the nonprofit NSO currently located in Sunspot, New Mexico, Otero County, has about 35 employees and 200 visiting scientists each year, and there are about 60 employees at their telescope at Kitt Peak in Arizona. NSO was recently approved to construct a telescope in Maui, which would remain after staff consolidation.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) funds NSO through the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Incorporated (AURA), NSO's parent company. Early in 2010, AURA and NSO will issue a solicitation for proposals from universities to consolidate NSO staff on their site. NSF will provide final approval for the chosen host site.

According to Hunter, if NMSU were selected to host NSO staff, the employees at Kitt Peak would probably be moved to New Mexico, and those in Maui would remain there. If NMSU is not selected, both the facility at Kitt Peak and the one at Sunspot would probably close.

GH/svb