

## **DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PROGRAMMATIC MASTER PLAN AND SHORT-TERM PLAN, QUANTICO NATIONAL CEMETERY, PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY, TRIANGLE, VIRGINIA**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) to assess the potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts from implementation of the Master Plan and Short-Term Plan for the Quantico National Cemetery (QNC) Prince William County, Triangle, Virginia Project. The PEA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 United States Code 4321 et seq.), as amended, the White House Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQs) "Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA" (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500–1508), VA's NEPA regulations titled "Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions" (38 CFR Part 26), and VA's (2010) NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects.

#### **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the Proposed Actions (also referred to as the Preferred Alternatives) for the PEA is to continue to provide eligible veterans and their families in the Triangle, Virginia area with a national cemetery of sufficient size and capacity to serve the projected needs in this region.

The objective of the Short-Term Plan is to meet burial needs over the next seven to ten years, by constructing approximately 6,500 preplaced crypts and 3,500 in-ground cremains, an ossuary and memorial wall, and all supporting facilities and utilities, roads and storm drainage, site furnishings, and irrigation and landscaping for land development. The Short-Term Plan encompasses approximately 14.7 acres of land within the existing cemetery, and is the first phase of the Long-Term plan. This phase is currently being designed; construction would begin in 2020.

The objective of the Long-Term Plan is to create a conceptual Long-Term Master Planning tool to plan out the future of the Cemetery to be implemented as approximately 12 to 14 separate phases, for the full build-out potential of the entire 725-acre property. These phases would be developed every seven to ten years, or as dictated by demand.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The VA NCA services our nation by providing final resting sites to active duty members and veterans of the U.S. military and their families. Veterans and their families are honored with lasting tributes that commemorate the sacrifice and service that veterans have provided to the nation in northern Virginia at QNC. The QNC is located in Triangle, Virginia, approximately 25 miles south of Washington, DC, and 24 miles north of Fredericksburg on Interstate Route 95. It is located on property that was formerly part of the Marine Corps Base Quantico (MCBQ) that was initially established in 1918. The United States Marine Corps donated 725 acres of land to the NCA in January 1977, with the intent to establish the facility now known as QNC. The formal dedication of the QNC occurred on May 15, 1983.

A Master Plan for the QNC that described the overall landscape design and conceptual features, was developed by a design team composed of architects, engineers, and landscape architects. The overall intent was to provide an atmosphere of reverence and serenity with features that blended into the natural wooded terrain to provide a natural shrine. The Master Plan emphasized the importance of native plantings in the overall design to highlight views and features, and beautify or accentuate roadway intersections, building approaches, and entrances. The Master Plan described the intent to provide funerary and burial services to over 600,000 veterans and their families at the QNC. The NCA has developed approximately 140 acres of the site at present.

The initial phases of QNC development are complete, which included construction of two administration buildings, the Maintenance Center, access and dual entrance roads, entrance gates, a cortege area and restroom facility area, and multiple committal service shelters. There are also nine memorials that have been constructed throughout the cemetery. An additional construction phase is ongoing to expand burial areas, provide necessary upgrades to the Old Administration Building, and expand the existing Old Administration Building parking lot to accommodate staff parking needs. It includes the development of cemetery features originally described in the Master Plan, including columbaria, standard burial areas, and preplaced crypts. Additionally, development of an ossuary (vaulted structure for placement of cremated remains) and a memorial wall with a plaza is part of the ongoing phase of development.

#### **PROPOSED ACTION (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES)**

**Short-Term Plan.** The Short-Term Plan, which is currently under design, is the first phase of the Long-Term Master Plan development covered by this PEA, and is intended to be implemented immediately following the completion of this PEA. The Short-Term Plan/Phase 1 is located on approximately 14.7 acres of land south of Quantico Drive, and immediately to the west of the existing Sections 26-28, within the cemetery. It includes six sections of crypt burials, five sections of cremains burials, an ossuary and memorial wall, a security gate, and associated infrastructure. It is examined in detail sufficient to assess fully its environmental effects in the Draft PEA. This expansion and improvements described in the PEA will begin in 2020, and it is anticipated that construction of this phase of expansion and improvements will be completed by approximately 2022.

**Long-Term Plan.** The Long-Term Plan is intended to provide a phased guide for the full build-out potential of the 725-acre cemetery. Of this acreage, approximately 140 acres is already developed and open for burials. Due mostly to topographic limitations, approximately 330 of the 725 acres are expected to be developed for the Long-Term Plan. As mentioned earlier, the Long-Term Plan is conceptual in nature, and is anticipated to be implemented in 12-14 phases, over the course of decades, as need and demand dictates. Each of its future phases would be similar in nature to the short-term plan in scope, except that longer roadway sections across ravines, streams, and wetlands would be required as part of Phases 5 and 12. Implementation of each will require completion of new NEPA documentation in order to update any changes in layouts, design, species and cultural resources surveys, federal or state requirements, and to obtain required permits.

The Short-Term and Long-Term Plans include all supporting infrastructure including parking pullouts, grave and section markers, irrigation, landscaping, visitor amenities, signage, masonry, stormwater features, and operational facility improvements.

Operations and maintenance are included as part of the Preferred Alternatives and would consist of similar activities as those currently conducted for the existing developed cemetery. Maintenance activities include trimming and replanting of landscaping and vegetation as needed, trash and debris removal, cleaning and repainting of buildings and structures/amenities as needed, irrigation repair, cleaning and repair of storm drain basins, channels, and maintenance of roads, parking and fencing. Each national cemetery is managed by VA NCA personnel in conformance with national and regional policies, priorities, goals, and objectives. Typical operation activities include burial or inurnment of veterans and eligible family members and the placement and maintenance of grave markers and niche covers. Cemetery operations include conducting ceremonies, as well as the maintenance of the graves, structures and grounds.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

In addition to the Proposed Actions described above, VA evaluated a No Action Alternative. Although the No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the project, this alternative was retained, because it reflects the status quo and serves as a benchmark against which the effects of the Proposed Action can be evaluated, as required under the CEQ Regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1502.14).

Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Actions would not be implemented. Veterans and their families residing in northern Virginia would be underserved starting in the year 2022; without adequate burial capacity at the QNC, veterans and their families would need to travel further to the closest available national cemetery, Arlington National Cemetery, or to a private cemetery for burials. The No Action Alternative would create a hardship for the survivors of deceased veterans for attending the funerals and for grave visitations, because of the distances between homes and the burial sites. If veterans and their families must resort to private burials, they are deprived of the honor and privilege bestowed upon them by a grateful nation for their service to their country.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS AND COMPLIANCE**

In consideration of these regulations and guidance, the following topics were dismissed from further consideration as environmental impacts were determined to be negligible or not relevant to the analysis: community services, Essential Fish Habitat and fisheries, benthics, environmental justice, floodplains, land use and zoning, and recreation. As documented in the PEA, the VA concludes that no significant adverse impacts, either individually or cumulatively, would result from implementation of the Preferred Alternatives.

- **Aesthetics** – There would be minor, temporary adverse impacts to the visual quality of the sites for cemetery visitors during construction. Forested areas would be cleared and replaced by burial space, amenities, infrastructure, and landscaping, similar to the appearance of the existing cemetery. Over the long-term, the aesthetics of the cemetery would change considerably but very gradually. There would be a permanent effect on aesthetics.
- **Visitor Experience**—Visitors would experience minor temporary noise and visual disturbance due to ongoing construction. These areas would be temporarily inaccessible to visitors. Once

completed, both the Short-Term and the Long-Term Plans would result in permanent, moderate, beneficial effects in the availability of more burial space and greater amenities.

- **Air Quality and Climate Change** – There would be negligible to minor, short-term to long-term adverse impacts as result of implementation of the Preferred Alternatives. Construction activities and long-term maintenance activities would generate minimal fugitive dust emissions and exhaust emissions from heavy equipment; however Best Management Practices (BMPs) for these would be utilized. There would also be an expected temporary and permanent but minor increase in vehicle emissions due to more visitors.
- **Geology, Topography, and Soils** – Minor, short-term adverse erosion and sedimentation impacts are anticipated during construction with implementation of the Preferred Alternatives. Implementation of stormwater management and erosion and sediment control BMPs would substantially reduce erosion and sedimentation impacts. For both the Short-Term and the Long-Term Plan Preferred Alternatives, there would be minor, permanent adverse effects on the topography due to developing hilly terrain; however, the steepest slopes would not be developed for burials. There would be no effect the subsurface geology of the site for either of the Preferred Alternatives.
- **Aquatic Resources** –Implementation of the Short-Term Plan Preferred Alternative is anticipated to have no temporary or permanent adverse impacts on jurisdictional waters or wetlands; this 14.7-acre phase has been designed to avoid these areas. The conceptual layout for the Long-Term Plan Preferred Alternative also avoids and minimizes impacts to jurisdictional areas; except that road crossings over jurisdictional areas likely will be needed. However, it is the intention of the Long-Term Plan Preferred Alternative to avoid any direct impacts to jurisdictional areas by implementing road crossings that span them, if practicable. In addition, no stormwater infrastructure will be placed in jurisdictional areas. Adherence to the conditions of the Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) Permit would prevent and mitigate potential stormwater impacts associated with new construction. Overall, there would be temporary and permanent, minor adverse effects for the Long-Term Plan. The Preferred Alternatives are anticipated to have no or minor permanent adverse impacts on groundwater; this would only be if groundwater was used for irrigation for the Long-Term Plan.
- **Wildlife and Terrestrial Habitat** – Construction of the Preferred Alternatives would have temporary to permanent, incremental but minor adverse impacts from the permanent and temporary loss of habitats. However, over the long-term, development and phasing will occur in small phases, such that wildlife may adapt.
- **Threatened and Endangered Species and Bald Eagles** – Potential habitat for the federally listed northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalist*), and the small whorled pogonia (*Isotria medeoloides*) occurs within Short-Term and Long-Term Plan boundaries within the cemetery. However, surveys were conducted for the Short-Term Plan, and none of these species were found. Implementation of the Short-Term Plan Preferred Alternative may affect, but is not anticipated to adversely affect, those federally listed species. For each subsequent phase of the Long-Term Plan, surveys and re-coordination with the USFWS would be required. Implementation of the Preferred Alternative is unlikely to disturb nesting bald eagles

*(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)* and does not intersect with eagle concentration areas. No candidate species are located within the impact area of the project.

- **Noise** – Temporary, minor adverse impacts from general construction noise would potentially occur due to construction vehicles entering and exiting the cemetery, and land preparation, grading, and other construction work. Normal cemetery operations, which include noises associated with the operation and maintenance of the cemetery as well as regular committal services (salutes using rifle blanks) and other ceremonial activities, would be anticipated to increase gradually as compared to existing conditions with implementation of the Preferred Alternative, for the Long-Term Plan. There would be permanent, minor adverse effects for both Preferred Alternatives.
- **Hazardous, Toxic, and Radioactive Waste (HTRW)** – Minor, temporary adverse impacts may occur if there is gasoline spill from construction equipment or vehicles during implementation of the Preferred Alternative; however, otherwise, no temporary or permanent adverse impacts resulting from HTRW are anticipated with implementation of the Preferred Alternative. There is no known history of HTRW or activities that would generate HTRW occurring within the limits of construction of the Preferred Alternatives.
- **Cultural Resources** – Results of a previous Phase I Archeological Survey covered all high probability areas in the Short-Term Plan area of potential effect (APE). A portion of a site previously determined not NRHP eligible is the only archaeological resource within the APE. A determination of no adverse effect for both archaeology and landscape was made. For subsequent phases of the Long-Term Plan, a predictive model for archaeology, cultural resource surveys, and re-coordination with the appropriate agencies and Tribes would occur as each new phase is developed.
- **Socioeconomics** - The Short-Term and Long-Term Plan Preferred Alternatives would have a negligible, temporary beneficial effect on the socioeconomic environment. Construction of the cemetery expansion would temporarily support jobs, or bring transient workers into the Prince William County resulting in a minor economic benefit. Because the development for both Short-Term and the Long-Term Preferred Alternatives will be contained entirely within the existing cemetery property boundaries, both will have negligible short-term and long-term effects on surrounding communities and will not adversely affect any disadvantaged communities.  
**Utilities** - For both the Short-Term and the Long-Term plan Preferred Alternatives, utility services would need to be expanded into each phase, as developed. However, both the Short-Term plan and the Long-Term Plan could have a minor temporary adverse effect during construction, but will have a negligible permanent effect on utility supply and demand for the surrounding area.

The project is in full compliance with the NEPA and is also in compliance with all applicable environmental laws, guidance, and policies. No significant cumulative adverse effects to any resources are anticipated. No potential for generating substantial controversy was identified. There are no wetland or waters impacts that will result from the Short-Term Plan and therefore, no wetland or stream mitigation will be required. The Endangered Species Act, Section 7 consultation is ongoing and will be completed prior to the Final FONSI. The National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation has been completed and a finding of no adverse effect from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Historic Resources was

provided on January 16, 2020. The Coastal Zone Management Act Federal Consistency Determination Report was submitted to the Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ) on December 9, 2019. The VDEQ provided a concurrence letter to the Federal Consistency Determination Report on January 24, 2020.

The project will comply with the requirements of the Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook. The Construction contractor has developed a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and is seeking coverage under the Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System General Construction Permit.

#### **AGENCY, PUBLIC, AND TRIBAL GOVERNMENT COORDINATION**

The VA, as the federal proponent of this Proposed Action, is publishing this Draft PEA and Draft FONSI for a 30-day public comment period, as announced in a Public Notice that is being published in the InsideNOVA publication.

Copies of the Draft Programmatic EA and NOA are available for public review at Quantico National Cemetery, and Dumfries Neighborhood Library, 18115 Triangle Shopping Plaza Dumfries Virginia 22028 and the VA website: [www.cem.va.gov/ea.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/ea.asp). For further information please contact ATTN: Ms. Jill Schattel, NCA Environmental Engineer, 425 I Street NW, Washington DC 20001. Phone (202) 815-9682. Email: [Jill.Schattel@va.gov](mailto:Jill.Schattel@va.gov).

The Draft PEA also is posted on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Norfolk District public website. As part of the public review process, letters are being distributed to local, state and federal agencies. Coordination with resource agencies has been ongoing and also is being conducted concurrently with this comment period. Any comments received from resource agencies and the public will be considered in the development of the Final PEA and Final FONSI.

#### **MINIMIZATION AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

The Programmatic Environmental Assessment contains a description of minimization measures and BMPs that serve to avoid and minimize potential environmental impacts. Key minimization and best management practices that have been incorporated into the EA include the following:

- avoidance all waters and wetlands for the Short-Term Plan;
- minimization of all waters and wetlands for the Long-Term Plan, such that only stream crossings for roadways will be necessary;
- avoidance and minimization of impacts on threatened and endangered species, through coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for each subsequent phase of the Long-Term Plan;
- avoidance and minimization of impacts on cultural resources, through coordination with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and Tribes, for each subsequent phase of the Long-Term Plan;
- minimization of fugitive dust emissions through appropriate dust control measures and covering of equipment, and rapid dirt removal from streets;

- minimization of nitrous oxide emissions via following BMPs for construction equipment such as maintaining equipment, reducing idling time, and use of electrical or alternatively fueled equipment; and
- application of stormwater BMPs to reduce erosion and sedimentation impacts to minimize short-term and long-term impacts to soils and mitigate potential impacts to water quality.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES**

The project will comply with the Energy Policy Act of 2005 for procurement of energy-efficient products. The Contractor will be required to satisfy federal mandates for procurement of products and materials meeting recommendations for post-consumer content and recovered materials content. Scrap plastic and lumber will be returned to manufacturers for recycling programs if possible; if this is not available, local recyclers will be sought after to reclaim recyclable materials.

#### **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

As described in the PEA, no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effects on the human environment are anticipated to result from implementing the Short-Term and Long-Term Preferred Alternatives. Therefore, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is appropriate and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

**FONSI Prepared By:** VA NCA

**FONSI Approval**

---

**Michael Roth, Director, Design and Construction Service**

**Date**