

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI):
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
GRAVESITE EXPANSION,
SALISBURY NATIONAL CEMETERY
SALISBURY, NORTH CAROLINA

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with gravesite expansion at the Salisbury National Cemetery, incorporated herein by reference. This proposed project would cover approximately 14 acres with the boundary of the western parcel of the Salisbury National Cemetery. The proposed project would provide for burial operations within the next decade, including the construction of burial facilities and required supporting infrastructure for cemetery operations and maintenance, such as roadways, retaining walls, utility systems, irrigation, site furnishings, signage and landscaping. The EA was prepared in accordance with the *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* (NEPA) (42 United States Code 4321 et seq.), the White House Council on Environmental Quality's "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 *NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects*.

The **purpose** of the Proposed Action is to continue to enable the NCA to provide eligible Veterans and their families with a national cemetery of sufficient size and capacity to serve the projected need in the Salisbury region over the next decade. The Proposed Action is **needed** to meet the NCA's goal of providing eligible Veterans with reasonable access to VA burial options.

Background

NCA is responsible for providing cemetery services for veterans and other eligible persons pursuant to the provisions of the *National Cemeteries Act of 1973* and other statutory authority and regulations. Under this mandate, NCA is responsible for the operation and maintenance of existing national cemeteries and the construction of new national cemeteries. NCA further defines this objective on the assumption that the burial needs of a Veteran are met if they have reasonable access to burial options, where reasonable access to a burial option is defined as "...a first interment option (whether for casketed remains or cremated remains, either in-ground or in columbaria) in a National or State Veterans Cemetery available within 75 miles of the Veteran's place of residence."

In 2014 there were 881 burials at the Salisbury National Cemetery, and 882 in 2015. At current rates of demand, the supply of pre-placed crypt casketed sites will be exhausted by approximately August 2021. Traditional casketed burial sites are anticipated to be depleted by October 20156. In-ground cremains sites will be exhausted by June of 2017. Additional capacity for cremains is being immediately addressed with a small ongoing project that is anticipated to extend that capacity for approximately 2 additional years. Columbarium sites are anticipated to be depleted by September 2018.

The Proposed Action will address the need for interment capacity within the next decade. Without increased capacity Salisbury National Cemetery is anticipated to reach full capacity (except for subsequent burial of spouse and family members) in the near future. There is no other open National Cemetery in North Carolina, and the closest National Cemetery to Salisbury that has remaining burial sites available is over 125 miles from Salisbury. Without expansion of capacity at Salisbury National Cemetery, there will

not be a nearby existing cemetery that can accommodate the burial needs of Veterans residing in North Carolina.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is for gravesite expansion by the development of an additional 14 acres of the cemetery property. The Proposed Action will provide additional traditional caskets and pre-placed crypt burial sites and additional capacity for both in-ground and columbarium sites for cremains. Development will include excavation and grading, construction of cemetery facilities and supporting infrastructure, and landscaping.

Alternatives

Only a single active alternative was developed for this potential project. Potential development at the Salisbury National Cemetery western parcel is constrained by the locations of existing facilities, hill slopes, and the 100-year floodplain of Grants Creek. The design for the Proposed Action maximized parcel use within those constraints.

The No Action Alternative was considered as a benchmark against which the effects of the Proposed Action could be evaluated. For this project, No Action was defined as not expanding and improving the Salisbury National Cemetery, but continuing burial operations until the current cemetery capacity is reached and conducting site maintenance activities thereafter.

The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the project, and would not meet the NCA's goal of providing eligible Veterans with reasonable access to VA burial options in North Carolina. Veterans and their families residing in North Carolina would be underserved in the future, which would require Veterans and their families to travel further to the nearest available national cemetery, 125 miles from Salisbury and located in South Carolina.

Environmental Analysis

As documented in the EA, NCA concludes no significant adverse impacts, either individually or cumulatively, would result from implementing the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would have negligible or no long-term or short-term impacts on cultural resources, land use or environmental justice. There would be minor, less-than-significant short-term impact to aesthetics, air quality, transportation and parking, and minor, less-than significant both short-term and long-term impact to geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, wildlife and habitat, noise, floodplains and wetlands, community services, solid waste and hazardous materials, and utilities. There is anticipated to be short- and long-term positive minor, less-than-significant socioeconomic impacts related to the Proposed Action. The only cumulative impact would be to the natural soil section and topography, which will be minor and less-than-significant.

Agency and Public Comment

Early scoping of the project included contact with governmental agencies for their input. The Notice of Availability for the Draft EA was published in the *Salisbury Post* on June 18th and 19th, 2016. The EA was made available at the Salisbury National Cemetery Administration Office and the Rowan County Public Library, as well as on the VA website. No comments were received on the Draft EA (Appendix D of the Final EA).

Minimization Measures

The analysis of the Proposed Action did not identify any mitigation measures required to reduce potential impacts to less-than-significant. In addition, VA will implement the routine minimization measures and best management practices identified in the EA (Section 5.0) and any additional minimization measures required by permitting agencies.

Finding of No Significant Impact

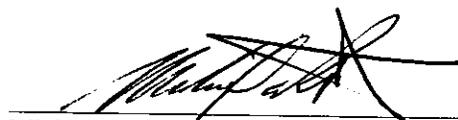
As a result of the analysis of impacts in the EA, summarized and incorporated by reference herein, it is the conclusion of the VA that, with the implementation of appropriate best management practices and minimization techniques, the Proposed Action would not generate significant public controversy nor have a significant adverse impact on the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(C) of NEPA. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.



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8/29/16

Date



Michael T. Roth
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8/17/16

Date

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

GRAVESITE EXPANSION AT SALISBURY NATIONAL CEMETERY, SALISBURY, NC

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announces preparation and availability of "Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)" for the proposed gravesite expansion at the Salisbury National Cemetery in Salisbury, North Carolina. The Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) document was posted on the VA website and available in hardcopy at Salisbury National Cemetery administrative offices and Rowan County Public Library. Notice of Availability (NOA) of the DEA was published in the *Salisbury Post* on June 18 and 19, 2016. The NOA started a 30-day comment period, and announced that the DEA findings indicated that the proposed action would not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. After incorporating comments into Environmental Assessment (EA), and upon reviewing the EA it was found that the implementation of the Proposed Action as described would not constitute a major federal action that would have significant impact upon the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of NEPA of 1969. Accordingly, VA has finalized a FONSI and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Action is not required.

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