
**Department of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery Administration**

**Report to Congress on the Establishment of Additional
National Cemeteries**

Annual Status Report

As Required by the National Cemetery Expansion
Act of 2003, Public Law 108-109

May 2009

**Status of New Cemetery Development
National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003, Public Law 108-109**

Establishment of a national cemetery includes these major processes:

Major Process	Bakersfield	Birmingham	Columbia/ Greenville	Jacksonville	Southeastern Pennsylvania	Sarasota
Potential Sites Identified (within primary 75-mile service radius)	Completed Dec 2004	Completed Dec 2004	Completed Jan 2005	Completed Mar 2005	Completed Apr 2004	Completed Dec 2004
National Environmental Policy Act Compliance	Completed Apr 2006	Completed July 2006	Completed Mar 2006	Completed Apr 2006	Completed Dec 2005	Completed Jan 2006
Land Acquisition	Completed Nov 2008	Completed July 2007	Estimated Sep 2009	Completed July 2008	Completed Apr 2008	Completed April 2007
Master Planning & Design Development Contract Award	Completed Oct 2007	Completed Sep 2007	Completed July 2007	Completed Aug 2007	Completed April 2008	Completed July 2007
Phase 1 Construction Documents Preparation Contract Award	Completed Mar 2008	Completed Mar 2008	Completed Jan 2008	Completed Feb 2008	Completed May 2008	Completed Jan 2008
Phase 1 Construction Contract Award	Completed Nov 2008	Completed Sep 2008	Completed May 2008	Completed July 2008	Estimated Apr 2009	Completed June 2008
Begin Burials	Estimated June 2009	Estimated May 2009	Completed Jan 2009	Completed Jan 2009	Estimated Dec 2009	Completed Jan 2009
Phase 1 Construction Completion	Estimated Oct 2011	Estimated Aug 2011	Estimated June 2011	Estimated Sep 2011	Estimated Dec 2011	Estimated July 2011

Note: Letters in **BOLD** indicate that the major process has been completed.

**Status of New Cemetery Development
National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003, Public Law 108-109**

BACKGROUND:

Public Law 108-109 - Not later than 4 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in accordance with chapter 24 of title 38, United States Code, shall establish six new national cemeteries. The new cemeteries shall be located in the following locations (those locations having been determined by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to be the most appropriate locations for new national cemeteries):

- (1) Southeastern Pennsylvania.
- (2) The Birmingham, Alabama, area.
- (3) The Jacksonville, Florida, area.
- (4) The Bakersfield, California, area.
- (5) The Greenville/Columbia, South Carolina, area.
- (6) The Sarasota County, Florida, area.

Bakersfield National Cemetery (Bakersfield, California)

PAST ACTIVITY:

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) contacted State and local representatives and Veterans' groups in a December 2003 letter acquainting them with this initiative and soliciting possible cemetery site locations. Only one site was offered as a potential site for the national cemetery, a 500-acre tract just east of Bakersfield. The Tejon Ranch Company identified 2,000 acres of their land for consideration. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) identified the two best 500-acre parcels for environmental assessment (EA). The URS Group, Inc., was retained to prepare the EA, which was published in March 2006; 30-day public comment period concluded in April 2006. NCA awarded a master plan contract in October 2007. NCA acquired the 500 acre donation site on November 19, 2008.

CURRENT ACTIVITY:

Phase 1A (Fast Track) project is under construction and scheduled for completion in May 2009. Phase 1B is in the construction document phase, with anticipated completion in June 2009.

NEXT STEPS:

June 2009 – Phase 1A (Fast Track) construction is scheduled for completion in May 2009 with a cemetery opening planned for June 2009.

September 2009 – Phase 1B Construction Documents are scheduled for completion in June 2009, and a planned fall 2009 construction contract award.

BUDGET:

Appropriation for FY 2005 included approximately \$150,000 in the Major Construction, Advanced Planning Fund for site selection activities and preparation of an Environmental Assessment.

Appropriation for FY 2006 included \$41 million for the purchase of land for the six new cemeteries.

Appropriation for FY 2007 included \$2 million for master planning and design development.

Appropriation for FY 2008 included \$19.5 million for construction documents and construction.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

Due to the unavailability of water for irrigation, NCA will pursue minimal irrigation and utilize water-wise landscaping for the Phase 1 development (10-year build out).

Alabama National Cemetery (Birmingham, Alabama)

PAST ACTIVITY:

NCA contacted State and local representatives and Veterans' groups in a December 2003 letter acquainting them with this initiative and soliciting possible cemetery site locations. Four sites adjacent to the American Village complex in Montevallo, AL, were offered for VA's consideration. An NCA representative met with Representative Spencer Bachus (R-AL, 6th District) and local officials at American Village in May 2004.

A contract to prepare the EA of the optimum site(s) was awarded in December 2004. The 30-day public comment period ended on July 28, 2006. NCA selected a combination of four properties to make up the acquisition site; however, two of the properties were no longer available. NCA then chose a single 495-acre parcel for acquisition, appraised at \$8 million, which NCA acquired on July 27, 2007, for \$8,056,674.

CURRENT ACTIVITY:

Phase 1A (Fast Track) project is currently under construction. Phase 1B is currently in the construction document phase.

NEXT STEPS:

May 2009 – Phase 1A (Fast Track) burial section is expected to complete construction with a cemetery opening in May 2009.

July 2009 – Phase 1B Construction Documents are scheduled for completion in June 2009, for a planned summer 2009 construction contract award.

BUDGET:

Appropriation for FY 2005 included approximately \$150,000 in the Major Construction, Advanced Planning Fund for site selection activities and preparation of an Environmental Assessment.

Appropriation for FY 2006 included \$41 million for the purchase of land for the six new cemeteries.

Appropriation FY 2007 included \$2 million for master planning and design development.

Appropriation for FY 2008 included \$18.5 million for construction documents and construction.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

None

Fort Jackson National Cemetery (Columbia/Greenville, South Carolina)

PAST ACTIVITY:

NCA contacted State and local representatives and Veterans' groups in a December 2003 letter soliciting possible cemetery site locations. A total of four sites were offered for consideration in Union, Newberry, and Richland Counties. An EA conducted from January 2005 through March 2006 determined the Richland County 600-acre tract within Fort Jackson in the City of Columbia the best site for development. This site is available for transfer from the Department of Army at no cost. The 600-acre land transfer is provided for in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2007. DOD Army (Ft. Jackson) and VA have finalized the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the land transfer which NCA signed on January 24, 2008; Ft. Jackson signed the MOA on February 19, 2008.

Due to the various approval levels within the Army for the land transfer to occur, the Army issued a permit to allow construction and VA's use of the land.

Construction started on the property in June and completed an early burial area in December 2008. Fort Jackson was the first of these six new cemeteries to open with burials beginning on January 5, 2009.

CURRENT ACTIVITY:

Completing Phase 1B construction documents.

NEXT STEPS:

May 2009 – Award Phase 1B construction contract with an anticipated completion of June 2011.

BUDGET:

Appropriation for FY 2005 included approximately \$150,000 in the Major Construction, Advanced Planning Fund for site selection activities and preparation of an Environmental Assessment.

Appropriation for FY 2006 included \$41 million for the purchase of land for the six new cemeteries.

Appropriation for FY 2007 included \$2 million for master planning and design development.

Appropriation for FY 2008 included \$19.2 million for construction documents and construction.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

The land transfer continues to progress through Army concurrence levels and is currently estimated for completion by September 2009.

Jacksonville National Cemetery (Jacksonville, Florida)

PAST ACTIVITY:

NCA contacted State and local representatives and Veterans' groups in a December 2003 letter acquainting them with this initiative and soliciting possible cemetery site locations. On January 23, 2004, NCA representatives met with the Mayor, City Hall staff, Representative Ander Crenshaw (R-FL, 4th District) and Representative Cliff Stearns (R-FL, 6th District) to discuss the process of establishing a national cemetery, as well as to have a question and answer session. On the following day, NCA representatives participated in a Veterans Forum hosted by Representative John Mica (R-FL, 7th District).

Site visits in July 2004 and January 2005 identified a total of 14 potential sites. Two sites in Duval County, near the airport were determined to be the best suited for the national cemetery. Both these sites were evaluated in an EA from March 2005 – December 2005, and the public comment period concluded in April 2006. Based upon the results of the EA, NCA selected a 568-acre site owned by the City of Jacksonville as the preferred site. VA acquired the site on July 30, 2008.

Construction on the cemetery started in August and an early burial area was completed in December 2008. Burials began at the cemetery on January 7, 2009.

CURRENT ACTIVITY:

Phase 1B construction documents were awarded in June 2008 and are in progress.

NEXT STEPS:

April 2009 – Complete Phase 1B construction documents.

August 2009 – Award the Phase 1B construction contract for a planned September 2011 completion.

BUDGET:

Appropriation for FY 2005 included approximately \$150,000 in the Major Construction, Advanced Planning Fund for site selection activities and preparation of an Environmental Assessment.

Appropriation for FY 2006 included \$41 million for the purchase of land for the six new cemeteries.

Appropriation for FY 2007 included \$2 million for master planning and design development.

Appropriation for FY 2008 included \$22.4 million for construction documents and construction.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

None

Washington Crossing National Cemetery (Southeastern Pennsylvania)

PAST ACTIVITY:

On March 31, 2003, Representative Jim Gerlach (R-PA, 6th District) introduced H.R. 1516 directing the establishment of a national cemetery for Veterans in southeastern Pennsylvania. On September 23, 2003, NCA officials hosted a "Town Hall" meeting with southeastern Pennsylvania Veteran leaders and representatives at the VA Regional Office in Philadelphia to discuss the alternative sites. Through general consensus of the group, the Pennhurst and Graterford sites were endorsed for further consideration. The sites are both owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

NCA representatives considered twelve possible alternative sites. Sites were evaluated in the vicinities of Norristown, Valley Forge, Embreeville, Pennhurst, Graterford and Bucks County.

NCA's environmental consultant completed a preliminary assessment of the Pennhurst site, a former mental hospital containing 35 buildings. They found that significant environmental clean-up, asbestos abatement, and building demolition would be required to make the site useable for a national cemetery. Pre-construction costs for this remediation were estimated at \$14 million to \$24 million.

A tract in northern Bucks County at Riegelsville owned by the Catholic Church was offered for consideration. Toll Brothers Corporation also offered a 200-acre tract at Dolington in southern Bucks County at Upper Makefield Township for consideration. Sale of the Dolington site to VA was conditioned on the ability of Toll Brothers to obtain zoning variances to allow higher density residential construction on their other properties in the vicinity.

An EA was completed in November 2005 addressing the three sites: Pennhurst, Riegelsville, and the Toll Brothers property. The public comment period concluded in late December 2005 and VA selected the Toll Brothers site as the preferred alternative.

Acquisition of the Dolington site was stalled by zoning issues and possible litigation on linked properties in a Toll Brothers transaction. NCA met with Toll Brothers representatives in August 2007, successfully de-linking the Dolington site with a sales price of \$10.5 million (\$2.2 million under the 2006 appraised value). NCA received the signed offer-to-sell from Toll Brothers on October 2007 and NCA signed accepting the offer-to-sell on November 2007.

CURRENT ACTIVITY:

Phase 1B construction documents were awarded in March 2009. A program agreement with the Pennsylvania State Historical Office is being finalized.

NEXT STEPS:

April 2009 – Award a construction contract for Phase 1A (Fast Track) with an anticipated completion in December 2009.

BUDGET:

Appropriation for FY 2005 included approximately \$150,000 in the Major Construction, Advanced Planning Fund for site selection activities and preparation of an Environmental Assessment.

Appropriation for FY 2006 included \$41 million for the purchase of land for the six new cemeteries.

Appropriation for FY 2007 included \$2 million for master planning and design development.

Appropriation for FY 2008 included \$29.6 million for construction documents and construction.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

None

Sarasota National Cemetery (Sarasota, FL)

PAST ACTIVITY:

NCA contacted State and local representatives and Veterans' groups in a December 2003 letter acquainting them with this initiative and soliciting possible cemetery site locations. On January 30, 2004, NCA representatives met with members of the SW Florida National Cemetery Advisory Committee to discuss the process of establishing a national cemetery, as well as to have a question and answer session. Subsequently, with the Committee's help, a total of 23 sites were identified for consideration. Three sites were selected as suitable for cemetery development.

A contract to prepare the EA of these three sites was awarded in December 2004 and completed in December 2005 with the 30-day public comment period concluding in January 2006. Based upon the EA, a portion of the Hawkins Ranch was selected as the preferred site for acquisition. NCA received a signed offer-to-sell on January 2007 on the 295-acre property for \$15 million. NCA acquired the 295 acre property on April 24, 2007, at a purchase price of \$14 million.

Construction on the cemetery started in July and an early burial area was completed in January 2009. Burials began at the cemetery on January 9, 2009.

CURRENT ACTIVITY:

Phase 1B construction documents are in progress.

NEXT STEPS:

April 2009 – Complete Phase 1B construction documents.

June 2009 – Award Phase 1B construction contract, with an anticipated completion in July 2011.

BUDGET:

Appropriation for FY 2005 included approximately \$150,000 in the Major Construction, Advanced Planning Fund for site selection activities and preparation of an Environmental Assessment.

Appropriation for FY 2006 included \$41 million for the purchase of land for the six new cemeteries.

Appropriation for FY 2007 included \$2 million for master planning and design development.

Appropriation for FY 2008 included \$27.8 million for construction documents and construction.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

None