1. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), National Cemetery Administration (NCA), completed a Site-Specific Environmental Assessment (SEA), included herein by reference, to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the Proposed Action to implement the 2018 Gravesite Development and Cemetery Improvements Plan ("2018 Expansion") at the Calverton National Cemetery (CNC), located in eastern Long Island at 210 Princeton Boulevard, Calverton, Suffolk County, New York. CNC is currently the largest, and one of the most active, National Cemeteries currently overseen by the VA (VA, 2018a).


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.

In 1978, VA opened CNC to serve Veterans and their families throughout the New York City metropolitan area. Since then, several expansion phases have been completed according to the 1977 CNC Master Plan, which identified the phased design and layout for full build-out of CNC over several decades. The most recent phase, completed in 2008, added 36,500 new interment sites and was estimated to provide additional burial capacity through 2019 (VA, 2008). However, due to gravesite depletion, additional burial capacity is needed to extend the longevity of CNC and allow NCA to continue providing burial opportunities to future generations of eligible Veterans and their families who other would not have long-term, reasonable access to burial benefits at a National Cemetery in the New York City metropolitan area.

Two other National Cemeteries are located on Long Island: Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York (approximately 70 miles southwest) is closed to new interments, and the Long Island National Cemetery in Farmingdale, New York (approximately 40 miles southwest), has capacity for only cremated remains in columbaria. The nearest National Cemeteries with capacity for casketed remains are the Washington Crossing National Cemetery in Newtown, Pennsylvania (approximately 150 miles southwest) and the Indiantown Gap National Cemetery in Annville, Pennsylvania (approximately 230 miles southwest). These National Cemeteries are not located within a reasonable distance (75 miles) of Veterans and their families residing in the New York City metropolitan area.

Thus, the purpose of the Proposed Action is to enable NCA to continue providing interment benefits to eligible Veterans and their families by further extending the longevity of CNC.

Due to gravesite depletion, the Proposed Action is needed to allow NCA to continue meeting its goal of providing eligible Veterans with reasonable access to VA burial options in the New York City metropolitan area.
2. Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the 2018 Gravesite Development and Cemetery Improvements Plan would be implemented at CNC. The Proposed Action would create new interment areas and make improvements to existing roadways, buildings, and maintenance areas within the existing property boundary as summarized in the following outline and described in greater detail in the SEA.

- **Interment Areas** – Seven new burial sections covering approximately 44 acres would be established for 26,592 new interment areas, including 24,242 standard pre-placed crypts, 175 oversized pre-placed crypts, 175 triple depth pre-placed crypts, and 2,000 in-ground cremains. Limited clearing of approximately 7.7 acres of existing pine and hardwood trees. Irrigation lines would be extended to maintain native, non-invasive vegetation. The new burial sections would be located adjacent to existing burial areas in the eastern portion of CNC and accessible from Calverton Drive and Col Francis S. Gabreski Way.

- **Roadway Improvements** – Full-depth pavement replacement of approximately 3.8 miles of existing site roadways would be performed by in-place pavement recycling/reclamation method in accordance with New York State Department of Transportation Standards. New paving would occur on Lt. Michael Murphy Way and portions of existing Roger Williams Road, and new mountable concrete curb would be installed at the edge of pavement at specified intersections.

- **Site Concrete** – Existing site concrete would be replaced to match existing concrete walkways and vehicle/heavy duty concrete slabs.

- **Minor Site Improvements** – All existing flower watering stations and irrigation hydrants used for landscaping watering would be replaced. New section markers and street name signage would be installed. Existing concrete pavers at the Public Assembly Area would be replaced.

- **25A Yard** – The approximately 28-acre northern storage yard (“25A Yard”) with access to Route 25A would be decommissioned. The existing structures would be demolished and removed. The existing cesspit and well would be decommissioned and removed in accordance with local and state regulations. Approximately 15.2 acres of pine and hardwood trees would be cleared. The area would be graded and seeded with native vegetation to allow for potential future development of burial sections.

- **Sound Barrier Wall** – A modular 8-foot high sound-dampening wall would be installed within the wooded area between the Veterans Circle committal shelters and Route 25 to increase the solemnity of memorial services. No tree clearing would be required.

- **Maintenance Complex** – Limited clearing of approximately 0.05 acres of pine and hardwood trees would occur to allow for construction of three new maintenance out-buildings (storage sheds). Other improvements include replacing HVAC systems; constructing wash bay; and expanding and fencing in of the maintenance complex yard.

The Proposed Action would extend the longevity of CNC and accommodate long-term burial needs of future generations of Veterans and their families in the New York City metropolitan area. Therefore, the Proposed Action would meet the purpose and need for action. The Proposed Action is also consistent with the 1977 CNC Master Plan. No other reasonable action alternatives were carried forward for analysis.
2.2 No Action Alternative

In addition to the Proposed Action described above, VA evaluated a No Action Alternative as required by CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1502.14). Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. CNC would continue accepting burials until such time that gravesite capacity is reached, at which point no new internments would be accepted. Thus, Under the No Action Alternative, the longevity of CNC would not be extended, and Veterans and their families residing in the New York City metropolitan area who seek burial at CNC would be underserved in the future. Veterans and their families in this area would be required to travel beyond a reasonable distance (75 miles) to other National Cemeteries with capacity in eastern New York or eastern Pennsylvania, or utilize a private cemetery for burials. 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. Thus, VA would not be in compliance with the requirements of the Service Members Civil Relief Act.

While the No Action Alternative would not satisfy the purpose of or need for action, it was retained to reflect the status quo and provide a comparative baseline against which the effects of the Proposed Action could be evaluated.

3. Summary of Environmental Consequences

Based on the SEA, incorporated in its entirety herein, VA determined there would be no significant adverse impacts, considered individually or cumulatively, from the construction or operation of the Proposed Action to the environmental resources analyzed in detail in the SEA. The following paragraphs summarize the environmental impacts identified in the SEA.

Construction activities associated with the Proposed Action would occur over an approximately 18-month period and include land clearing, grading, extension of irrigation utilities, road paving, installation of pre-placed crypts, demolition of facilities in the 25A Yard, construction of maintenance out-buildings, and installation of a modular sound barrier. Where the construction activities cannot entirely avoid impacting the environment, the Proposed Action incorporates measures to minimize potential impacts at less-than-significant adverse levels to resources including aesthetics, air quality, cultural resources (associated with inadvertent discovery), topography, soil, groundwater, wildlife and habitat, noise, solid waste management, transportation, and the irrigation utility. Except for wildlife and habitat, adverse impacts to all other resources would end once the 18-month construction period is completed. The loss of approximately 22.5 acres of forest habitat would have a long-term, less-than-significant adverse impact on common flora and fauna, and a negligible impact on the federally-listed northern long-eared bat (NLEB), as this forest habitat does not contain many snags or hardwoods preferable for roosting. Additionally, time-of-year-restrictions on tree clearing and building demolition would be implemented to further avoid potential impacts to the NLEB. Construction would have a short-term, less-than-significant beneficial impact on socioeconomics, as a result of hiring local workers and purchasing construction materials from local and regional vendors when practical.

Under the Proposed Action, existing VA staff would professionally operate and maintain the new expansion areas and infrastructure. Operation of the Proposed Action would have long-term beneficial impact on aesthetics by expanding the park-like setting to more areas of CNC. Additionally, the modular sound barrier would reduce traffic noises on SR 25 from reaching the committal shelters along Veterans Circle, improving the solemnity of memorial services at CNC. Current operational maintenance activities would be extended to the new burial sections and include irrigation, mowing of newly landscaped areas, and cleaning new memorial markers. The noise from these activities would have a less-than-significant impact on visitors, because the levels and short-term durations would be similar to operational noises currently generated and experienced by visitors to CNC, which have not resulted in adverse impacts.
Potential impacts to soil quality associated with excavations for individual burial sites would be maintained at less-than-significant adverse levels by minimizing the generation of excess soils, limiting the area of soils exposed at one time, and revegetating exposed soils with native, non-invasive vegetation.

Operation of the Proposed Action would have a long-term, significant beneficial impact on community services by providing approximately 26,592 new interment sites and extending the longevity of CNC for at least another decade. Extending the longevity of CNC would also have a long-term, beneficial impact on socioeconomics by lessening the costs of visitors who travel to CNC and who also reside in the New York City metropolitan area.

Construction and operation of the Proposed Action would have no adverse impact on parking, geology, environmental justice, community services other than burial services, or on resources that are not present at the Project Study Area, including surface waters, floodplains, wetlands, and coastal zone management areas. Implementing the Proposed Action would not generate substantial public controversy.

4. Impact Minimization Measures. To ensure impacts to the environment remain at less-than-significant adverse levels, VA would implement the management, avoidance, and regulatory compliance measures identified in the SEA, which are reiterated in Appendix A of this FONSI. These measures include construction BMPs, including fugitive dust control, soil erosion controls, establishing appropriate stormwater drainage patterns, post-construction vegetation restoration, and implementing time-of-year restrictions on clearing to avoid impacts to the NLEB.

5. Agency and Public Comments

VA involved regulatory agencies and the public in decision-making for this Proposed Action. A Notice of Availability (NOA) announcing the release of a Draft SEA for a 30-day comment period was published in Newsday on February 24 and 26, 2019, and Suffolk County News on February 28, 2019. The Draft SEA was available for review at the Riverhead Free Library and an electronic copy was made available for download from the VA website at http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/EA.asp. Additionally, VA mailed letters to selected federal, state, and local governmental agencies about the availability of the Draft SEA and the opportunity to comment during the 30-day review period.

No comments were received from the public during the 30-day review period. Comments were received from two regulatory agencies. The NY State Department of Environmental Conservation concurred with the findings presented in the Draft SEA and reiterated the tree clearing time-of-year-restriction to avoid impacts to the NLEB. The Suffolk County Planning Commission (SCPC) had no objections to the Proposed Action. As requested by SCPC, VA coordinated with the NYS Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission (CPBJPPC) because CNC is located within the Compatible Growth Area of the Central Pine Barrens Comprehensive Land Use Plan. No comments from CPBJPPC were received. The regulatory agency correspondence has been incorporated into the Final SEA and were considered prior to a decision being made on whether or not to implement the Proposed Action.

6. Finding of No Significant Impact

As a result of the analysis of impacts presented in the Final SEA, summarized and incorporated in its entirety by reference herein, it is the conclusion of VA that, with the implementation of appropriate management, avoidance, and regulatory compliance measures included herein as Appendix A, the Proposed Action would not generate significant public controversy and would have no significant impact of an adverse nature on the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Therefore, per the NEPA, the CEQ regulations, and 38 CFR Part 26, I am signing this FONSI, and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Action is not required.
## AESTHETICS

### Construction

- Control fugitive dust emissions through routine construction BMPs. Available methods include application of water, dust palliative, or soil stabilizers; use of enclosures, covers, silt fences, or wheel washers; and suspension of earth-moving activities during high wind conditions. Further measures to prevent dust emissions include covering haul trucks and installing gravel-covered pads to remove dirt from the tires of vehicles leaving the Proposed Action construction site.

- If warranted, erect temporary privacy fencing around the construction area that are visible to visitors from existing cemetery areas.

### Operation

- Perform routine and scheduled professional landscape maintenance to ensure the upkeep of the park-like appearance of the grounds and associated physical infrastructure (e.g. roads, interment areas).

## AIR QUALITY

### Construction

- Control fugitive dust emissions as described for Aesthetics.

- Stabilize exposed soil with vegetation or mulching to minimize erosion and subsequent dust generation.

- Limit construction vehicle speeds within the Calverton National Cemetery at or below posted limits. This will minimize dust generated by vehicles and equipment on paved surfaces. On unpaved surfaces at the site, vehicle speeds will be maintained at or below 5 miles per hour to prevent the generation of dust from exposed soil.

- Stabilize previously disturbed areas through revegetation or mulching if the area would be inactive for several weeks or longer.

- Visually monitor all construction activities on a daily basis, and particularly during extended periods of dry weather; implement additional dust control measures as needed.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

### Construction and Operation

- In the unlikely event that human remains or cultural resources are encountered during construction, an “Inadvertent Discovery” plan should be immediately implemented. If prehistoric or historic artifacts that could be associated with Native American, early European, or American settlement are encountered at any time within the project site area, the project shall cease all activities involving subsurface disturbance in the vicinity of the discovery and the New York State Historic Preservation Office would be contacted immediately in accordance with [Section 14.09 of the New York State Historic Preservation Act](http://www.state.ny.us/history/agency acts/act.htm).

Attachment A, Page A-1
**GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY, AND SOILS**

**Construction**

- Prior to conducting any work, develop a soil erosion and sediment control (SESC) plan for approval by the VA. Install and maintain sedimentation and erosion control measures, including the use of silt fencing, synthetic hay bales, specified loading and unloading areas, covering exposed soils during anticipated storm events, and revegetating soils with temporary and/or permanent native, non-invasive vegetation as soon as construction conditions allow.

- Follow NCA Design Guidelines and grade all burial areas with a slope of less than 15%. Ensure all grades allow surface run-off to flow away from roadways and burial areas.

- Maintain construction equipment in good working order. Ensure the construction contractor has an emergency spill kit and is prepared to respond to a release of petroleum-based fluids (diesel, hydraulic fluid) to soil.

- Refuel construction equipment in designated impervious areas away from pervious soil surfaces.

- Reuse excess soils as a source of on-site fill to the maximum extent technically feasible. Excess soils that cannot be used on-site would be transported off-site for reutilization.

**Operation**

- Conduct routine landscaping to ensure soil remains vegetated and stabilized to prevent erosion.

- Temporarily stockpile excavated soil for individual burial sites at the maintenance area (or other designed on-site storage area). Seed or sod new burial sites to prevent erosion of soil.

**HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY**

**Construction**

- Implement the BMPs listed above for Geology, Soils, and Topography to minimize sedimentation of run-off.

- Develop a site design that maintains or restores pre-development hydrology during post-development conditions to the maximum extent technically feasible according to EISA Section 438.

- Landscape using native, non-invasive, drought-resistant vegetation to reduce irrigation volumes.

- Implement spill and leak prevention and response procedures, including maintaining a complete spill kit at the project area, to reduce the impact of incidental releases of petroleum-based fluids from construction and operational equipment on groundwater quality.

- Refuel machinery in designated maintenance areas, on impervious services, to reduce the possibility for accidental spills or discharges to reach underlying groundwater resources.

**Operation**

- During operations, pesticide/herbicide applications (as part of routine maintenance activities) would be conducted to the minimum extent necessary and in accordance with manufacturer specifications, to avoid impacts to underlying groundwater resources.

**WILDLIFE AND HABITAT**

**Construction**

- Conduct tree clearing during the winter months (between November 1 and March 31) to avoid any potential take of northern long-eared bats. Similarly, the demolition of structures at the
25A Yard must also occur between November 1 and March 31 to avoid potential impacts to northern long-eared bats using these structures as day roosts.

### NOISE

#### Construction

- Coordinate with CNC Administrator prior to mobilizing construction machinery through the existing cemetery to avoid and minimize noise-related disturbances to ongoing memorial services.
- Inform CNC Administration at least 24-hours in advance of conducting any unusually loud activities in order to schedule such activities during a time that would avoid disrupting a memorial service.
- Perform construction during daylight, weekday hours, unless there is a specific activity that requires completion outside of this normal construction schedule.
- Schedule construction activities to minimize impacts to memorial services to the extent possible, unless there is a specific activity that would directly impact the current operation of the cemetery, in which case the activity would be scheduled outside of the normal construction schedule.
- Comply with OSHA requirements to protect hearing of workers around loud construction equipment.
- Shut down heavy equipment and other noise emitters when they are not in use.
- Equip construction equipment with appropriate sound-muffling devices (i.e. from the original equipment manufacturer or better) and limiting engine idling to less than 5 minutes.
- Design, construct, and maintain the sound dampening wall to reduce noise impacts from SR 25 to Veterans Circle.

### SOLID AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

#### Construction

- A regulated building materials survey will be performed on the Yard 25A buildings prior to their disturbance or demolition. Based on the survey findings, the buildings will be demolished, transported, and disposed of according to applicable federal and state regulations.
- Recycle excess construction materials and soils to the maximum extent practicable.
- Compost cleared vegetation on- or off-site.
- Manage solid wastes and hazardous materials according to VA’s solid and hazardous materials SOPs and management measures specified in NCA Master Construction Specifications, and applicable federal and state laws.

#### Operation

- Manage excess soils in the existing fenced yard located along Calverton Way.

### TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

#### Construction

- Coordinate with CNC Administrator to identify the preferred entrance and exit points relative to daily mobilization of construction equipment and workers, and prior to mobilizing construction machinery through the existing cemetery to avoid interfering with cortege travel.
- If warranted, utilize flaggers to notify oncoming traffic of slower construction vehicles entering or exiting the cemetery from SR 25.
**UTILITIES**

**Construction**

- In advance of disconnecting electrical service at the 25A Yard, communicate with the utility provider to ensure no or minimal disruptions occur within CNC or to outside customers.

- Coordinate with Suffolk County Department of Health regarding the increase in groundwater extraction for irrigation supply water.