

NEPA Draft Environmental Assessment
Proposed Department Of Veterans Affairs
Florence National Cemetery Property Acquisition
Florence, Florence County, South Carolina

JUNE 24, 2015



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Executive Summary

This Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared during analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Veterans Affairs (VA) acquisition of property in Florence, South Carolina. The EA has been completed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 ([NEPA]; 42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and 38 CFR Part 26 (Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions).

The proposed acquisition of property is a 14.33 acre tract located north of East National Cemetery Road in in Florence, South Carolina. The project site has been forested for approximately the past 30 years. Prior to this the site consisted of residential streets and lots, with single family residences. These homes and most structures have been removed as the site was acquired by the City of Florence.

Site information used to develop this EA was obtained during several walking and driving reconnaissance efforts on the property. Environmental resource information was also obtained from scoping letter submittals and responses from state and Federal agencies, from information that was obtained through local, state and federal government websites, and other appropriate sources. Responses received to date include those from the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) – Hydraulics Section, SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) and are addressed within this EA. Mitigation efforts are not required to prevent or minimize potential adverse impacts, as no planned development has been determined at this time.

NEPA encourages the participation of Federal and State agencies and any interested or affected citizens and organizations in the environmental review process. During the environmental review process, this EA will be distributed for agency and public comment. Based on the initial responses from the government agencies and the mitigation efforts outlined in this EA, VA presumes a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to the human environment is likely to be issued for this proposed action.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Description

The project includes the proposed acquisition of a total of 14.33 acres in Florence, South Carolina. See Location Map – Figure 1. The proposed acquisition will add the subject property to the FNC as potential future expansion of facilities purpose yet to be determined. The project site has been forested for approximately the past 30 years. Prior to this the site consisted of residential streets and lots, with single family residences. These homes and most structures have been removed as the site was acquired by the City of Florence.

1.2 Purpose and Need of Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed acquisition of property is to provide the expanded to the growing Veteran population in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. The proposed acquisition of property would provide futures space for the use of veterans populations as an alternative under the national cemeteries program.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives to the proposed action are; acquisition of the subject property or taking no action, and not expanding the ownership footprint of the FNC.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

3.1 Aesthetics

Affected Environment

The project site consists of 14.33 acres land. The area has been forested for approximately the past 30 years. Prior to this the site consisted of residential streets and lots, with single family residences. These homes and most structures have been removed as the site was acquired by the City of Florence. The surrounding areas include residential areas to the north, existing National Cemetery Property to the west and south and vacant wooded land to the east.

Environmental Consequences

The usage of the subject property for the purposes of expanding the existing footprint of the FNC would be compatible with current land uses and aesthetics values. The existing cemetery consists of a quiet use facility for the burial of deceased veterans and dependents. The future use of the property would be consistent with this current use. The landscaping and beautification maintenance efforts would continue to maintain the current values of the area.

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to aesthetics are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.2 Land Use

Affected Environment

The project site consists of 14.33 acres land. The area has been forested for approximately the past 30 years. Prior to this the site consisted of residential streets and lots, with single family residences. These homes and most structures have been removed as the site was acquired by the City of Florence. The surrounding areas include residential areas to the north, existing National Cemetery Property to the west and south and vacant wooded land to the east.

Environmental Consequences

The usage of the subject property for the purposes of expanding the existing footprint of the FNC would be compatible with current land uses and aesthetics values. The existing cemetery consists of a quiet use facility for the burial of deceased veterans and dependents. The future use of the property would be consistent with this current use. The landscaping and beautification maintenance efforts would continue to maintain the current values of the area.

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to land uses are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.3 Geology and Soils

Affected Environment

As determined from the USGS topographical maps Florence West and Florence East, South Carolina quadrangles dated 1986, the subject site is situated approximately 32 meters above mean sea level with topography sloping to the east toward a tributary of Jeffries Creek. Water bodies are not depicted on the site. Based on a review of the topographic map and observations of general area and site topography, surface run-off would be expected to flow to the east toward a tributary of Jeffries Creek with areas to the west considered topographically up-gradient.

The subject site is located within the Coastal Plain Physiographic Province. The soils encountered in this area are the residual product of in-place chemical weathering of rock presently underlying the site and/or historic depositional events. In general, shallow unconfined groundwater movement within the overlying soils is controlled largely by topographic gradients. However, as the groundwater percolates downward, it becomes controlled by the subsurface geologic conditions. Thus, the direction of groundwater movement in the deeper aquifers may not be consistent with the reflecting topography.

Surface waters primarily recharge shallow aquifers by infiltration along higher elevations. Once in the shallow aquifer, the groundwater typically discharges into streams or other surface water bodies at lower elevations. The depth of the shallow water table is transient and can vary with seasonal fluctuations in precipitation. Groundwater movement in the shallow aquifer is generally from higher to lower elevations. As such, shallow groundwater is expected to flow generally to the east toward a tributary of Jeffries Creek. Based on the presumed groundwater flow direction, properties located to the west appear to be up-gradient relative to the site. However, regional influences may have an impact on groundwater flow. The actual groundwater flow direction

cannot be determined without site-specific information obtained through the installation of groundwater monitoring wells.

An ASTM standard E1527-13 Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was performed on the site in February 2015. The Phase I ESA did not identify potential contamination sources of soil and/or recognized environmental conditions in connection with the project area.

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to geology and soils are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.4 Farmland

Affected Environment

The project site consists of 14.33 acres land. The area has been forested for approximately the past 30 years. Prior to this the site consisted of residential streets and lots, with single family residences. The surrounding areas include residential areas to the north, existing National Cemetery Property to the west and south and vacant wooded land to the east. No farmland currently exists on or adjacent to the subject property.

Environmental Consequences

There are no environmental consequences to farmland as a result of the proposed property acquisition.

3.5 Hydrology and Water Quality

Affected Environment

Surface waters primarily recharge shallow aquifers by infiltration along higher elevations. Once in the shallow aquifer, the groundwater typically discharges into streams or other surface water bodies at lower elevations. The depth of the shallow water table is transient and can vary with seasonal fluctuations in precipitation. Groundwater movement in the shallow aquifer is generally from higher to lower elevations. As such, shallow groundwater is expected to flow generally to the east toward a tributary of Jeffries Creek. Based on the presumed groundwater flow direction, properties located to the west appear to be up-gradient relative to the site. However, regional influences may have an impact on groundwater flow. The actual groundwater flow direction cannot be determined without site-specific information obtained through the installation of groundwater monitoring wells.

An ASTM standard E1527-13 Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was performed on the site in February 2015. The Phase I ESA did not identify potential contamination sources of soil and/or recognized environmental conditions in connection

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to hydrology and/or water quality are not anticipated as a result of this action.

3.6 Floodplains and Wetlands

Affected Environment

Review of the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) and superimposed by the site surveyor on the property survey. As shown the 100-Year Floodplain (Zone AE) and 500-Year Floodplain (Zone X) boundaries were not located on the subject site. The remainder of the project area is located in Zone X which is the 500 year floodplain. Copies of the survey with the FIRM designated floodplain areas near the site are included in the Exhibits.

The May 14, 2015 response from the USACE Hydraulics, Hydrology and Geotechnical Section states concurrence that the site is located in flood zone "X", outside the 100 and 500 year flood zones.

According to the National Wetland Inventory Map available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and a wetland delineation by ECS Carolinas, LLP, in February 2015, there are wetlands identified on and adjacent to the subject site. A copy of the National Wetland Inventory map, a wetland determination report/submittal and a survey dated February 19, 2015 are included in the appendices.

In February 2015, wetlands were delineated on the site using the 1987 USACE Wetland Delineation Manual and Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plain Regional Supplement. The wetlands have been field verified by the USACE as of June 4, 2015. Wetlands are regulated by the USACE and the SCDHEC, and require permits from these agencies prior to being impacted by dredge, fill or mechanized clearing activities. The USACE will issue final concurrence with location of the wetlands once a final survey plat is submitted to their office for review.

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Long-term impacts to hydrology and/or water quality are not anticipated as a result of this action. If future construction activities are proposed on the property then the impacts to wetlands will need to be considered and permits from the USACE and the SCDHEC may be required depending upon the proposed site plans.

3.7 Wildlife and Habitat

Affected Environment

The area has been forested for approximately the past 30 years. Prior to this the site consisted of residential streets and lots, with single family residences. The surrounding areas include residential areas to the north, existing National Cemetery Property to the west and south and vacant wooded land to the east. Wildlife habitat is notably poor due to the nature of previous land uses as well as surrounding developments.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Federally threatened and endangered species list for Florence County (shown in Table 1), four federally listed protected endangered/threatened species are known to be located in Florence County. The required habitat for each of these species is not present, nor were there sightings of any of these three species on the site.

Table 1. Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species within Florence County.

Major Group	Scientific Name	Common Name	Federal Status	Suitable Habitat On Site	Found on Site
Vertebrate	<i>Picoides borealis</i>	Red-cockaded Woodpecker	Endangered	No	No
Vertebrate	<i>Mycteria americana</i>	Wood Stork	Threatened	Yes (adjacent site)	No
Vascular Plants	<i>Oxypolis canbyii</i>	Canby's Dropwort	Endangered	No	No
Vascular Plants	<i>Schwalbea americana</i>	American Chaffseed	Endangered	No	No

Source: FWS, List of Threatened and Endangered Species of South Carolina.

In correspondence to the USFWS and SCDNR, the SCDNR replied on June 10, 2015 that precautions should be taken to prevent disturbance to Federally endangered species as well as the spotted turtle (*Clemmys gutata*). The spotted turtle is not a Federally protected species, and has no formal legal protection. The proposed project area is located within the Florence, South Carolina USGS Quadrangle. The SCDNR and USFWS both concur that no evidence exists that there are any federally listed threatened or endangered species on the site.

The May 12, 2015 letter from the USFWS states that no threatened or endangered species or their critical habitats occur on the site. A copy of the letter is included in the Appendix.

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to protected species and wildlife habitats are not anticipated as a result of this action. If future construction activities are proposed on the property - the possibility of impacts to protected species may need to be re-visited at that time, particularly if any changes to the endangered species listings for the area.

3.8 Air Quality

Affected Environment

Air quality at the proposed site location is anticipated to be typical of the air quality within Florence, located in Florence County and in proximity to the County. Florence County is located

within an attainment area for all pollutants. According to the US EPA and SCDHEC Division of Air Quality (NCDAQ).

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to air quality are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.9 Noise

Affected Environment

The proposed project area is located in a rural and residential area of Florence, South Carolina. Noise levels within the project area are relatively low. The project area is located approximately two miles west of the Florence Regional Airport. The project is adjacent to the existing Florence National cemetery, which is a relatively quiet use area. The FNC expansion is not currently affected by nor does it currently affect noise factors in the area.

Environment Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to noise are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.10 Transportation and Parking

Affected Environment

The area has been forested for approximately the past 30 years. Prior to this the site consisted of residential streets and lots, with single family residences. The surrounding areas include residential areas to the north, existing FNC property to the west and south and vacant wooded land to the east. No traffic or parking issues are presently caused as a part of routine operations of the FNC. During funerals, some increase in parking need is experienced.

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to transportation and parking are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.11 Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

The site is inclusive of areas adjacent to the former Florence Stockade, which was used to detain several thousand prisoners of war (POWs) during the waning months of the American Civil War. Also within the existing FNC properties, there exist mapped mass graves which were utilized to inter those that did not survive the internment as POWs. Also the area was previously farmed occupied historically. Brockington and Associates has conducted a Cultural Resources Reconnaissance of the site and have concluded and recommended that the site have a Phase One Archeological study conducted to fully account for cultural or historical resources.

Environmental Consequences

Based on the information received from the SHPO on May 26, 2015, and their review of the Brockington Report, they concur that the site have a Phase One investigation prior to any development., However, no development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to cultural or historic resources are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.12 Social and Economics

Affected Environment

The existing urban and suburban environment of the Florence, South Carolina area is representative of much of the southeastern U.S. It is an area that has experienced a transition from a largely agrarian based industry to manufacturing in the mid 20th century and since the contraction of the manufacturing economy in the 1980's to 1990's, has undergone recession and since begun a resurgence of more service based and information based service economy in the 2000's. It represents a hub of two interstate highways and railroads in multiple directions. Its location is transited by many who travel to and from vacation areas in Florida and coastal South Carolina.

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to above social and economic factors are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.13 Environmental Justice

Affected Environment

The site of the existing FNC property is within a mixed use area of Florence, South Carolina. The property involved has no residents. The surrounding areas include residential areas to the north, existing FNC property to the west and south and vacant wooded land to the east.

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to environmental justice factors are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.14 Hazardous Waste Sites

Affected Environment

We have performed a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment in conformance with the scope and limitations of ASTM Standard E 1527-13 of the site located between East National Cemetery Road and Walnut Street in Florence, Florence County, South Carolina. Exceptions to, or deletions from, this practice are described in Section 2.3 of this report. This assessment has revealed no evidence of recognized environmental conditions in connection with the site.

ECS observed scattered debris and piles of debris, including but not limited to tires, building materials, scrap metal, appliances, plastic, glass, and household litter throughout the site. ECS recommends that the debris be properly removed from the site

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to hazardous waste sites are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

3.15 Utilities

Affected Environment

The project area is located in area which municipal water and sanitary sewer services are available from the Town of Florence/Florence County. Sanitary sewer lines are located on the western portion of the site. Water lines are located along the roads that bound the site. The surrounding areas include residential areas to the north, existing FNC property to the west and south and vacant wooded land to the east.

Environmental Consequences

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to utilities and other public services are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

4.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

As part of the planning process, in accordance with the requirements for NEPA, this Draft EA will be made publically available for review and comment. A Notice of Availability will be published in the local newspaper and copies of the document will be made available for review online and in print at libraries in Florence, South Carolina for those that do not have access to computers. The comment period will be 30 days long. **REVIEW BY VA WILL PRECEED THE PUBLICATION OF THIS DRAFT EA.**

This Draft EA, and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be made publically available.

5.0 SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

The following table summarizes the potential impacts to the various resources from execution of the proposed action. No mitigation measures are required to reduce impacts to less-than-significant levels. A number of common design and/or construction management measures will be incorporated as noted.

SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS		
Resource	Impact Analysis	Management Measures
Aesthetics	No adverse impacts	None
Land Use	No adverse impacts	None
Geology and Soils	No adverse impacts	None
Farmland	No adverse impacts	None
Hydrology and Water Quality	No adverse impacts	None
Floodplains and Wetlands	No adverse impacts	None
Wildlife and Habitat	No adverse impacts	None
Air Quality	No adverse impacts	None
Noise	No adverse impacts	None
Transportation and Parking	No adverse impacts	None
Cultural Resources	No adverse impacts	None
Social and Economics	No adverse impacts	None
Environmental Justice	No adverse impacts	None
Hazardous Waste Sites	No adverse impacts	None
Utilities	No adverse impacts	None

No development plans have been provided at this time. The proposed acquisition is the only action to be taken at this time. Impacts to above environmental factors are not anticipated as a result of this proposed acquisition.

6.0 **CORRESPONDENCE/REFERENCES**

USGS Topographic Map, Florence South Carolina Quadrangle dated 1969 and revised 1994

Geologic Map of South Carolina, compiled by the South Carolina Geological Survey, dated 1985

U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources and Conservation Web Soil Survey, <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm>

National Wetland Inventory Wetlands Mapper, prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/Data/Mapper.html>

South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office Response Letter - May 26, 2015

South Carolina National Heritage Program, Rare Threatened and Endangered Species known to Occur in Florence County List, June 11, 2014

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, List of Threatened and Endangered Species,

South Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Air Quality, <http://daq.state.nc.us/planning/attainment.shtml>

Florence County GIS http://maps2.co.Florence.nc.us/geodata_08/

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Air Quality Nonattainment Areas Map January 2015

South Carolina Division of Water Quality – response :Letter May 12, 2015

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Hydraulics Section – Response Letter, May 14, 2015

ECS Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ECS Project Number 34-2129, dated April 23, 2015)

ECS Wetland Delineation Services (ECS Project Number 34-2048, dated April 9, 2015)

7.0 FIGURES

Figure 1 – Site Location Map

Figure 2 – Site 2010 Aerial Photograph

Figure 3 – Soil Map

Figure 4 – Stream/Wetland Location Survey

8.0 EXHIBITS

Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wetland Inventory Map

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Letter

SCDNR Correspondence

South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office Letter

Brockington Cultural Resources Report

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Water Quality Letter

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Email Correspondence

9.0 LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASTM	American Standard for Testing and Materials
BMPs	Best Management Practices
CO	Carbon Monoxide
dB	Decibel
DNL	Day-Night Sound Level
EA	Environmental Assessment
EDR	Environmental Data Resources, Inc
ESA	Environmental Site Assessment
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FNC	Florence National Cemetery
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Map
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NCAAQ	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NCDAQ	South Carolina Division of Air Quality
SCDHEC	South Carolina Division of Water Quality
SCDHEC	South Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources
SCDOT	South Carolina Department of Transportation
SER	Standard Environmental Records
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey
VA	United States Department of Veterans Affairs