

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
FOR PHASE 5 EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENTS AT THE
RIVERSIDE NATIONAL CEMETERY
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA**

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has prepared a Site-Specific Environmental Assessment (SEA) to identify, analyze, and document potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the 43-acre expansion (Phase 5 expansion) of Riverside National Cemetery and improvements to facilities and infrastructure throughout the original cemetery property. Riverside National Cemetery sits on 922 unincorporated acres in Riverside County, California, immediately west of March Air Reserve Base. Of the 922 acres, 646 acres are currently undeveloped. In 1978, following completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the construction and operation of a new National Cemetery in Riverside County, Riverside National Cemetery was opened. The findings of the 1978 EIS are updated throughout this SEA, which more precisely analyzes the potential effects of the expansion now that more specific design plans are available.

The SEA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 United States Code [U.S.C.] 4321 et seq.), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500-1508), Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions (38 CFR Part 26), and the VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to enable the VA to continue to provide eligible Veterans and their families in Southern California with a cemetery of sufficient size and capacity to serve the projected Veteran burial needs in this region.

The Proposed Action is needed to meet the National Cemetery Administration's (NCA) goal of providing eligible Veterans with reasonable access to VA burial options. In addition, the Proposed Action is needed to meet the NCA's goal of increasing burial options in areas with an unserved Veteran population of at least 80,000, as specified by Congress in response to the Evaluation of the VA Burial Benefits Program, and in accordance with the Service Members Civil Relief Act.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the VA would construct and expand operations on 43 acres within the original cemetery site to provide for at least 10 more years of burial expansion for all burial options (casket, columbarium, and in-ground cremation sites), supporting infrastructure, landscaping, drainage, irrigation, roadways and parking, signage, amenities, and operational facility improvements. The Phase 5 development would provide an additional 23,000 cremated remains areas (10,000 columbarium niches and 13,000 in-ground cremains) and 20,000 new casket burial sites. An early turnover area consisting of approximately 3,000 preplaced crypts would be constructed first to meet immediate interment needs before the expansion is complete.

Within the original cemetery, a public information booth and records building would be constructed, and the roadway entrance would be reconfigured.

Alternatives Considered

The SEA examined in-depth two alternatives, the Preferred Alternative and the No Action Alternative, defined as follows:

- **Preferred Alternative:** Under the Preferred Alternative, the Proposed Action would be implemented. A 10-year gravesite expansion would be implemented on 43 acres of undeveloped Riverside National Cemetery property, as well as necessary infrastructure repairs and upgrades on the existing developed cemetery.
- **No Action Alternative:** Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented and Riverside National Cemetery would not be expanded or improved. Interments would continue until the capacity of the current cemetery is reached, and site maintenance activities would continue thereafter. Veterans and their families residing in Southern California would be underserved in the future; in many cases, this would require many Veterans and their families to travel more than 100 miles to reach a National Cemetery in Southern California, or to use a private cemetery for burials. The distribution of National Cemeteries in the region would be unequal, and the VA would not be in compliance with the requirements of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. While the No Action Alternative would not satisfy the purpose of or need for the Proposed Action, this alternative was retained to provide a comparative baseline against which to analyze the effects of the Proposed Action.

Potential Environmental Effects

The SEA evaluated the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on the physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects of the Proposed Action's region of influence. The Preferred Alternative would result in no significant adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on the following resource areas that were considered in detail in this SEA: aesthetics, air quality, cultural resources, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, floodplains and wetlands, wildlife and habitat, noise, community services, solid and hazardous materials, utilities, or environmental justice.

In addition, any potential adverse effects on these resource areas would be further reduced or avoided through the implementation of standard environmental best management practices (BMPs) or optional management measures as discussed in the SEA and summarized in the attached table (Attachment A). The potential environmental effects associated with implementing the Preferred Alternative are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Aesthetics. Potential minor, short-term, adverse effects and minor, long-term, beneficial effects would be expected. The presence of construction equipment would affect the visual quality of the site; however, construction activities would be conducted with sensitivity for interment services, and impacts would be temporary and minor. In the long term, the Preferred Alternative would benefit aesthetics of the cemetery. Planned improvements to existing facilities would preserve existing aesthetics and prevent deterioration of facilities. The proposed expansion would enhance the aesthetic quality of the site to an area with parklike landscaping, with built structures adhering to NCA Facilities Design Guide criteria. Compatible landscaping would be planted in keeping with existing cemetery landscaping.

Air Quality. Minor, short-term adverse impacts on air quality would be expected. Fugitive dust emissions from ground disturbance and exhaust from construction equipment and vehicles could cause minor, localized, short-term impacts on air quality and create temporary nuisance concerns to surrounding landowners. Projected construction emissions would not exceed the *de minimis* thresholds. The Preferred Alternative would likely increase the number of vehicles traveling to and from the cemetery for burials and visitation, causing negligible long-term impacts on air quality from emissions.

Cultural Resources. As a National Cemetery, Riverside National Cemetery is listed on the National Register of Historic Place (NRHP). Improvements to the original National Cemetery property and facilities would result in minor short- and long-term adverse effects and minor, long-term beneficial effects on cultural resources. Beneficial effects include the addition of a new contributing resource to the NRHP-eligible cemetery. The Preferred Alternative would have no adverse effects on aboveground or belowground resources in the expansion site. Adherence to federal regulations and consultation with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and Native American stakeholder reduces the potential effects that the site preparation or construction would affect unknown underground cultural resources. The VA has coordinated with the California SHPO and has consulted with 30 Native American Tribes.

Geology and Soils. Minor, short-term, adverse impacts would be expected from soil erosion and sedimentation during construction activities that require earthwork. Exposure of the soils during construction could result in increased sedimentation into the on-site stormwater management system and the potential for off-site discharges. Adherence to BMPs would minimize the potential effects; no long-term erosion and sedimentation effects are anticipated. In some areas, the Preferred Alternative would result in minor alterations to topography to prepare moderately sloped areas for gravesite or facility development, as well as other minor grading and fill for the construction of roads. Effects would be minimized through a stormwater system that matches post-project hydrology to the pre-project hydrology of the site. There are no prime, unique, statewide, or locally important farmland on the site.

Hydrology and Water Quality. Minor, short-term, adverse impacts on surface waters and no effects on groundwater would be expected. Impacts on surface water would primarily result from potential turbidity and sedimentation associated with stormwater runoff from construction activities and the removal of vegetation in the expansion site. These impacts would be minimized through adherence to BMPs and would be minor and short term. In the long term, the use of routine herbicide application to maintain the parklike aesthetics of the cemetery would result in negligible adverse effects on water quality.

Floodplains and Wetlands. No impacts on floodplains would be expected; the Preferred Alternative is not located within a 100- or 500-year flood zone. An aquatic resources delineation was completed at the expansion site; no jurisdictional wetlands were found. As such, no impacts to wetlands are expected under the Preferred Alternative.

Wildlife and Habitat. Minor, adverse impacts on wildlife and habitat would be expected. Expansion of the cemetery would result in most of the existing vegetation being converted to irrigated lawn, with shrubs and trees planted in distinct areas. An existing federally listed endangered species is known to occur on the property (Stephen's kangaroo rat [SKR]). Construction activities under the Preferred Alternative would disturb and displace an estimated 15–50 SKR individuals. Short- and long-term effects on the SKR would be minimized by following the minimization and management measures described in the SEA, and through coordination with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Consultation with the USFWS in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act regarding the potential effects on the

SKR has occurred, and the USFWS has issued a Biological Opinion on the action. The VA will implement the conservation measures outlined in the Biological Opinion to minimize the incidental take of SKR. The habitat conditions at the project site are not ideal, and given the past disturbance, likely could not support the coastal California gnatcatcher or Nevin's barberry.

Noise. Minor, short-term, adverse impacts on sensitive noise receptors would be expected. Construction activities associated with the Preferred Alternative would result in minor, short-term, adverse impacts that would vary throughout the construction process. Peak noise exposure to adjacent receptors (i.e., the golf course) would be intermittent throughout the construction cycle, creating temporary nuisance noise that would not be considered significant. In the long term, operations and routine maintenance would generate noise, but would be considered negligible in the context of current sources of noise in the area. No new committal shelters would be constructed under the Preferred Alternative; noise associated with rifle solutes would occur at a similar frequency and level to current memorial services at the National Cemetery.

Community Services. Long-term, moderate, beneficial effects on community services would be expected, as the National Cemetery would be expanded and improved to meet the burial needs for Veterans and their families through 2029.

Solid and Hazardous Materials. Construction and renovation activities would generate solid waste in the short term, but effects would be considered negligible. Riverside National Cemetery has a spoils area, so excess soils associated with cemetery expansion would be relocated on-site. Operation of construction vehicles and equipment would have the potential for spills of fluids, fuels, and detergents, but effects would not be significant.

Utilities. Negligible impacts would be expected from expanding utility services to the expansion site. Utility services would be extended to the expansion site in coordination with local providers. Consumption or regional availability of utilities would not have significant impacts from the implementation of the Preferred Alternative.

Environmental Justice. The Preferred Alternative would not have adverse effects on environmental justice. Few concentrations of minority or low-income communities are within the immediate vicinity, and no related impacts on those groups relative to human health or environmental degradation would occur. The Preferred Alternative is not likely to have any measurable effect on local populations, and minority or low-income populations would not be expected to experience any disproportionately high or adverse environmental effects.

Cumulative Impacts. No significant cumulative adverse impacts on any resources are anticipated. The VA's adherence to BMPs during construction and operation would maintain any potential adverse impacts at less-than-significant levels. The operation of a National Cemetery is considered low-intensity, and no significant, adverse, cumulative impacts are anticipated from the improvements of Riverside National Cemetery.

Potential for Generating Substantial Public Controversy. The Preferred Alternative is not likely to cause controversy. No substantial public controversy regarding the Preferred Alternative was received during the public comment period.

Agency and Public Comment

During the SEA process, the Draft SEA was made available for a 30-day public comment period, beginning March 22, 2018, as announced in *The Press-Enterprise*. Review copies were

available for public review on the VA website. No public comments were received during this review period.

Consultation with agencies and Native American Tribes occurred concurrently with drafting the SEA, including coordination with the California Native American Heritage Commission, California Office of Historic Preservation, 30 Native American Tribes, USFWS, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Finding of No Significant Impact

As a result of the analysis of impacts in the SEA, which is summarized and incorporated by reference herein, it is the conclusion of the VA that, with the implementation of appropriate minimization and avoidance measures included herein as Attachment A, the Preferred Alternative would not generate significant public controversy or have a significant adverse impact on the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2c) of NEPA. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Bradley G

Phillips 156860

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Phillips 156860
Date: 2018.07.03 09:40:11
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Bradley Phillips
Pacific District Executive Director



Glenn Elliott
Environmental Engineer

Attachment A: Best Management Practices Incorporated into the Proposed Action

Technical Resource Area	Best Management Practice/Environmental Protection Measure
Aesthetics	Incorporate existing topography and natural features into site design, wherever possible.
	Maintain landscaped areas, buildings, roadways, and signage.
	Design the site to accentuate existing viewsheds.
	Conduct construction activities with a sensitivity toward maintaining the dignity and solemnity of the National Cemetery environment during interment services.
Air Quality	Use appropriate dust suppression methods during on-site construction activities. 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.
	Maintain an appropriate speed to minimize dust generated by vehicles and equipment on unpaved surfaces.
	Cover haul trucks with tarps.
	Stabilize previously disturbed areas through revegetation or mulching if the area would be inactive for several weeks or longer.
	Visually monitor all construction activities regularly, in particular, during extended periods of dry weather, and implement dust control measures, when appropriate.
Cultural Resources	Comply with the National Historic Preservation Act, Archaeological Resources Protection Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, and 36 CFR Part 79 during the proposed future development process.
	Implement procedures for inadvertent discovery if any archaeological resources are unearthed during construction or during excavation associated with burials, including coordination with SHPO and applicable Tribal representatives.
Geology and Soils	Phase clearing and grading to the maximum extent practical to prevent exposed inactive areas from becoming sources of erosion.
	Minimize erosion during and after soil disturbance using BMPs such as temporary seeding and planting, final vegetative cover, mulches, compost blankets, erosion-control blankets and mats, and soil tackifiers.
	Use water or a soil-binding agent or other dust control technique, as needed, to avoid wind-blown soil.
	Preserve existing vegetation and revegetate open areas, when practical. Do not remove temporary sediment control practices until final vegetative cover or permanent stabilization measures are established
	Control sediment, as needed, along the site perimeter and at all operational internal storm drain inlets at all times during construction.
	Design impervious surfaces to drain to stormwater management systems.

Technical Resource Area	Best Management Practice/Environmental Protection Measure
Hydrology and Water Quality	Develop a site design that prevents surface water runoff to the on-site and adjacent surface waters, and avoids interaction with on-site and adjacent surface waters.
	Develop a site design that accounts for pre-/post 100-year volume stormwater drainage at a minimum.
	Implement pre-/post 100-year volume stormwater retention, at a minimum.
	Implement stormwater management facilities and other related stormwater management infrastructure for the site.
	Clear ephemeral drainages and intermittent and perennial streams of all work items, debris, or other obstructions placed by, or resulting from, construction operations.
	Locate machinery servicing and refueling areas away from streambeds and washes to reduce the possibility and minimize the impacts of accidental spills or discharges.
	Inspect and maintain construction vehicles in good working order and maintain a spill kit.
	Establish turf on finished slopes and ditches within 14 days after completion of construction on a portion of the site.
	Continue involvement in the wastewater recycling program.
Floodplains and Wetland	Specific management and mitigation measures are not required.
Wildlife and Habitat	When controlling weeds and unwanted vegetation, take precautions to mow or scrape this vegetation during daylight hours and remove cut weeds.
	Implement the conservation measures outlined in the Biological Opinion to minimize the incidental take of SKR
	Use native vegetation in cemetery landscaping to the extent practicable.
Noise	Limit construction activity to daylight hours.
	Use properly maintained and muffled vehicles and equipment.
	Observe local noise ordinances at all times.
	Locate stationary operating equipment as far away from surrounding residents as possible. Shut down heavy equipment and other noise emitters when they are not in use.
Land Use	Specific management and mitigation measures are not required.
Socioeconomics	Specific management and mitigation measures are not required.
Community Services	Specific management and mitigation measures are not required.
Solid and Hazardous Materials	Inspect and maintain construction vehicles and equipment to reduce the risk of incidental spills or releases of hazardous fluids.
Transportation and Parking	Specific management and mitigation measures are not required.
Utilities	Design plans will be submitted to each available utility provider to determine specific connection requirements and implement the necessary connection requirements.
Environmental Justice	Specific management and mitigation measures are not required.