

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
SITE ACQUISITION FOR FUTURE EXPANSION  
OF THE SOUTH FLORIDA NATIONAL CEMETERY  
LAKE WORTH, FLORIDA 33449**

**Agency:** Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), National Cemetery Administration

## **Introduction**

Pursuant to the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1508, as they implement the requirements of the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, 42 U.S.C. § 4321, et seq., and VA's NEPA regulations titled "Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions" (38 CFR Part 26), and referred to the VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects (VA 2010), the VA conducted an assessment of the potential environmental impacts associated with implementation of the following Proposed Action: site acquisition for future expansion of the South Florida National Cemetery, in Lake Worth, Florida.

The environmental assessment considered all potential impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives, both as solitary actions and in conjunction with other proposed activities in the area. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the results of the evaluation of the Proposed Action and alternatives. The discussion focuses on activities that have the potential to change both the natural and human environments, and summarizes the options considered sited as proposed.

## **Proposed Action and Alternatives**

**Proposed Action:** The Proposed Action specifically would be the acquisition of an additional 25.07 acres (more or less) of property, located due west of the existing South Florida National Cemetery (SFNC). These properties are currently utilized as native plant nurseries. Three of the parcels encompass approximately 5.01 acres in area each and are currently owned and occupied by Abell's Nursery. The remaining, northernmost parcel covers about 10.04 acres in area, and is owned and occupied by California Growers. While no developmental plans for the assimilation of the parcels into the Master Plan of the cemetery have been developed, the intent of NEPA is also to consider such future uses; therefore, if the acquisition is completed, a separate Environmental Assessment (EA) will evaluate potential construction projects and potential impacts to the surrounding area.

If implemented, the Proposed Action would also likely include the redevelopment of the parcels in phases, as the use of the parcels is not an imminent need. It is anticipated that the initial phases of construction would involve the placement of utilities, roadways, parking, landscaping and irrigation, which would then be completed and in place at the time additional burial locations were needed.

**Alternatives:** One alternative to the Proposed Action was evaluated during the environmental impact analysis process. Under this alternative, the VA would not undertake the Proposed Action in any form or construct an expansion to the existing South Florida National Cemetery on these parcels. The current level of burial facilities available to eligible veterans in the South Florida area would remain unchanged. Under this alternative, Veterans would continue to utilize the veterans' cemeteries at the adjacent cemetery; however, this may lead to a time in the immediate future when the interment needs of veterans and their family members is underserved.

No environmental consequences would result from the implementation of the No Action Alternative.

### **Environmental Consequences**

**Aesthetics:** Acquisition would convert the property to fallow land. The appearance of the project site would change from ornamental nursery operations to a manicured cemetery landscape following future construction. The existing buildings and infrastructure would be demolished and removed, and the landscape would be altered. The future cemetery landscape would be in harmony with the adjacent developed areas of the cemetery. The perception of the changes to the view for visitors within the cemetery would likely be neutral or positive, as they would contribute to the solemnity and tranquility of the property. Similarly, the view of the properties from Park Lane East would change from rows of ornamental plants to a landscaped cemetery, and most likely just to a landscaped buffer. As a result, there will be no significant adverse, direct or indirect, impacts on aesthetics resulting in a long-term beneficial impact.

**Air Quality:** Construction activities associated with future redevelopment would include site grading and/or filling, and equipment traffic during construction. These activities would generate an increase of both coarse and fine particulate emissions from soil grading and sloping, and small-scale road construction. With the implementation of dust control measures and ensuring that construction equipment is operated and maintained in accordance with Federal and State air quality requirements, only minor short-term adverse impacts are anticipated, with no long-term impacts to air quality. Therefore, only minor short-term adverse impacts are anticipated, with no long-term impacts to air quality.

**Noise:** If the Proposed Action were implemented, the noise from operations at the nurseries would be eliminated following acquisition. Long-term, minor amounts of construction-related noise is anticipated associated with the construction of the pre-placed crypt gravesites, columbarium wall structures, visitor's areas, roadways, parking, and/or memorial monument areas. These will be localized, temporary, and limited to daytime hours, and would be short-term. Noise levels during construction will be short-term and minor, and consistent with a typical construction site. Neighboring properties would benefit from the fact that most construction activities would be set back from property boundaries. Since the development of a committal shelter within the area of Proposed Action is unlikely, rifle volleys are not anticipated. Therefore, there will be no significant noise impacts with the implementation of the Proposed Action.

**Solid Wastes and Hazardous Materials:** The regulated materials and fuels that are currently stored at the nursery are expected to be removed prior to assimilation of the property into the SFNC. However, in the event that hazardous or otherwise regulated materials remain on-site after the acquisition, the VA would be responsible for the disposal of the materials off-site in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local laws.

Acquisition activities related to decommissioning, and construction-related activities under the Proposed Action have the potential to generate solid waste from the removal of remnants of the existing nurseries, as well as site preparation. The Palm Beach County Solid Waste Authority currently operates a single lined landfill, with associated recycling operation, and a waste to

energy incinerator. It is anticipated that all solid wastes generated would be transported to this location for disposal, with a portion of the waste potentially separated and recycled prior to incineration. The relatively limited volumes of solid waste expected to be generated from these activities is anticipated to be a minor contributor to overall solid waste generation in the county and would not result in adverse impacts upon landfill capacity.

Excavated soils would be reutilized on-site in accordance with site design specifications. Excess soils (without debris) could be reutilized off-site, if necessary. Staging and operation of construction equipment carries an increased potential for incidental releases of vehicle fluids. Proper vehicle maintenance and inspection would reduce this potential, and adverse impacts are not expected.

Based upon the findings of a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment completed concurrently with this EA, the presence and/or potential presence of pesticides within soil and groundwater would have to be addressed in regards to the handling of these materials, as it relates to human/worker exposure. Assuming adequate soil and groundwater management, worker safety concerns are addressed during development, and soils are not to be transported off-site, the presence of the identified pesticides at the site is expected to have only a minor adverse impact to the development of the parcels.

**Water Resources:** No drainage changes would occur by acquisition, but water extraction for nursery use would cease. Drainage changes resulting from changes to site topography are anticipated to be minimal and would be monitored for erosion potential through routine site storm water management practices. Minor short-term adverse erosion and sedimentation impacts would be possible during both the construction and operational phases of the project. Construction activities (including vegetative clearing, adjustments to site grading, and construction of small structures) would disturb and expose subsurface soils, increasing susceptibility to wind and surface runoff erosion. Wind erosion could temporarily increase airborne particulate matter in the area, resulting in short-term health, visibility, and aesthetic impacts. Temporary increases in sedimentation within the storm water management system could occur as a result of surface runoff erosion.

Minor short-term adverse erosion and sedimentation impacts could be minimized through implementation of construction best management practices and conformance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements. Any best management practice would have to consider the potential presence of and impact to soil and/or groundwater. A general storm water discharge permit from the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) would be needed at the time of construction, as these activities would disturb one or more acres of land. Thereafter, no long-term impacts would occur.

**Floodplains, Wetlands, And Coastal Management:** Under the Proposed Action, acquisition would have no impact on wetlands or coastal management. Thereafter, erosion and sedimentation from future construction activities would be minimal and would be managed using the on-site storm water management system, or a modification to the system, and would be in accordance with SFWMD requirements. Any such modification should consider the identified presence of pesticide impacts to groundwater, and either complete confirmatory testing at that time to determine if impacts are still present, or be designed to limit drainage features at, or

proximate to, identified groundwater impacts. As such, no impacts to wetlands or water quality of the surrounding area would occur as a result of the Proposed Action. Because the site is located within a 500-year floodplain, per executive order, future construction and design activities will have to take the flood designation into consideration.

**Transportation Systems:** Acquisition of the parcels would decrease traffic, as vehicle movement associated with operations at the nurseries would be discontinued. Following incorporation into the SFNC Master Plan and development, it is assumed that the parcels will contain internal roads and parking, but public access would be provided through the cemetery's main entrance on SR 441, and not from Park Lane East. As such, the long-term effect on traffic would be a decreasing vehicle count along Park Lane East. Vehicle traffic on internal roads would likely be minimal at the onset of the expansion and increase over time as the cemetery reaches capacity. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action will have a net beneficial impact on transportation along Park Lane East.

**Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice:** Acquisition of the parcels would result in a discontinuation of nursery operations, resulting in a loss of jobs. As compared to the overall number of nursery service jobs in the county, the lost jobs would account for less than two percent of the total. It is assumed the loss of services provided by these nurseries to the general public would result in a similar net increase in demand upon other nursery businesses, resulting in an increase in job growth. At best, job growth would equal the number of employees displaced from the closure of the current nurseries, so acquisition of the parcels would have no impact. Realistically, it is assumed that total job growth at other nurseries would not fully compensate for these losses, resulting in a minor negative impact.

At the time of construction, a minor short-term increase in employment could occur if the contractor retained to develop the expansion area hires additional local crew members, resulting in a possible short-term localized beneficial impact to employment. There would also be a minor, positive long-term effect upon jobs, as the operational period of the cemetery would increase, resulting in a need for cemetery staff over a longer period of time; but this incremental increase (following construction) is not expected to equal the number of jobs lost from the discontinued operation of the nurseries.

Once the properties are transferred to federal ownership and exempt status, local property taxes would no longer be collected. The loss of the property tax base is considered minor when compared to the overall tax base of the entire county. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action is not expected to have a disproportional impact on minority or low-income populations.

**Biological Resources:** There are no naturally occurring vegetative associations and no documented listed species occurrences within the site boundaries. For the acquisition portion of the Proposed Action, the site would change from ornamental nursery operations to fallow land. While no improvements to foraging would occur, the absence of human activity would likely have a minor positive impact on foraging activities. Once developed, the parcels would be modified into a manicured cemetery landscape. If the cemetery landscape ultimately filled the existing man-made surface water, it would have a minor negative impact with respect to wildlife and habitat.

A biological resources assessment completed concurrently with this EA recommended that clarification of the potential use of the site by wood storks should be completed as part of the regulatory consultation at the time of site development. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) can potentially require mitigation to off-set potential impacts to the loss of wood stork foraging habitat.

**Cultural Resources:** A cultural resource review conducted at the site concluded that no cultural resources exist on-site, and that it is highly unlikely that any significant resources, determined eligible or considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), would be found during construction activities at the site, and consultation with the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) confirmed this assessment. As a result, no impacts to cultural resources are anticipated. In the event that cultural resources were identified during construction, activities would be stopped in the area, and the SHPO would be consulted prior to the implementation of further construction activities.

**Land Use:** Acquisition would change the parcels to fallow land. Under the Proposed Action, the site would change from ornamental nursery operations, to a manicured cemetery landscape when developed. The removal of diesel fuel on the site would eliminate the risk of potential releases to the site in the future. Therefore, the cemetery landscape would likely have a positive impact with respect to land use.

**Geology, Soils, and Farmland Protection:** For the acquisition of the parcels, as well as for future development, no impact to geology is anticipated.

Less than significant short-term and long-term impacts to soils are anticipated. On-site soils would be disturbed during the construction phase of the project, which could make them susceptible to experience erosion and sedimentation impacts. Also, the existing topography would be altered by grading for parking areas and burial sites.

The proposed development would convert the soils on the site, characterized by the US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) as farmland of unique and local importance, into nonagricultural use. As such, the VA would be required to complete a Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form (Form AD-1006) for the Preferred Action Alternative. Through this process a determination will be made as to whether the proposed conversion is consistent with the FPPA. It is expected that this development would have minor adverse impacts on farmland soils, given the size of the site and the surrounding land uses.

**Utilities and Community Services:** Acquisition of the parcels would have no impact upon utilities. Depending on the final design of the cemetery expansion, new connections to utility service providers existing in the area would be necessary. Groundwater from the on-site wells or new wells could be used to provide the site with potable and irrigation water, if needed. As compared to operational nurseries, no net impacts are expected.

**Potential for Generating Substantial Controversy:** The VA has solicited input from various federal, state, and local government agencies regarding the Proposed Action. None of these agencies expressed opposition to the Proposed Action. No areas of controversy were identified.

During scoping for this EA, the residents living in the immediate vicinity of the Proposed Action were notified of the proposed expansion, and were given a direct contact at the VA in the event they had any questions about the proposed project. No comments were received, and no issues identified; therefore this EA did not identify any area of substantial controversy.

**Cumulative Impacts and Minimization Measures:** There are no site-specific direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts associated with the Proposed Action, including those incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.

### **Regulations**

The Proposed Action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental laws or regulations, including NEPA or CEQ regulations.

### **Commitment to Implementation**

The VA and the National Cemetery Administration affirm their commitment to implement this EA in accordance with NEPA. Implementation is dependent upon funding. The VA and National Cemetery Administration will ensure that adequate funds are requested in future budgets to achieve the goals and objectives set forth in this EA.

### **Public Review and Comment**

The Palm Beach Post published a Notice of Availability on December 13-15, 2017. No comments were received during the public comment period ending January 15, 2018.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

Based upon my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached EA, incorporated by reference, I conclude that implementation of the Proposed Action will not have a significant environmental impact, either by itself or cumulatively with other nearby projects. Accordingly, the requirements of NEPA, the regulations promulgated by the CEQ and the VA are fulfilled, and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The signing of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) completes the environmental impact analysis process under VA regulations.

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**Stephan Frank**  
**Executive Director, NCA**

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**DATE**

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Date: 2019.09.30 15:15:19 -04'00'

**Fernando Fernandez**  
**Environmental Engineer, VACFM**

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**DATE**

Attachment: Environmental Assessment