

**FINAL**

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Environmental Assessment  
for  
Site Acquisition for Future Expansion  
of the South Florida National Cemetery  
Lake Worth, Florida 33449

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Prepared for:

US Department of Veterans Affairs

National Cemetery Administration

Washington, D.C.



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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION.....1**

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND ..... 1

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED ACTION .....2

1.3 NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION .....3

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE PROPOSED ACTION .....4

1.5 SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW .....5

1.6 RELATED INVESTIGATIONS AND DOCUMENTS .....6

**2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES .....7**

2.1 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION .....8

    2.1.1 Background.....9

    2.1.2 Proposed Action.....9

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE..... 11

2.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER STUDY 11

**3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES .....12**

3.1 AESTHETICS ..... 12

    3.1.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....12

    3.1.2 PROPOSED ACTION .....13

    3.1.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....13

3.2 AIR QUALITY..... 14

    3.2.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....14

    3.2.2 PROPOSED ACTION .....15

    3.2.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....15

3.3 NOISE ..... 16

    3.3.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....16

    3.3.2 PROPOSED ACTION .....17

    3.3.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....17

3.4 SOLID WASTES AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS ..... 18

    3.4.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....18

    3.4.2 PROPOSED ACTION .....19

    3.4.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....20

3.5 WATER RESOURCES .....21

    3.5.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....21

    3.5.2 PROPOSED ACTION .....22

    3.5.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....22

3.6 FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS AND COASTAL MANAGEMENT .....23

    3.6.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....23

    3.6.2 PROPOSED ACTION .....24

    3.6.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....25

3.7 TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS.....25

    3.7.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....25

    3.7.2 PROPOSED ACTION .....25

    3.7.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....25

3.8	SOCIOECONOMICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE .....	26
3.8.1	EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....	26
3.8.2	PROPOSED ACTION .....	27
3.8.3	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....	28
3.9	BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES .....	28
3.9.1	EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....	28
3.9.2	PROPOSED ACTION .....	30
3.9.3	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....	30
3.10	CULTURAL RESOURCES .....	31
3.10.1	EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....	31
3.10.2	PROPOSED ACTION .....	32
3.10.3	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....	32
3.11	LAND USE .....	32
3.11.1	EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....	32
3.11.2	PROPOSED ACTION .....	33
3.11.3	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....	33
3.12	GEOLOGY, SOILS, AND FARMLAND PROTECTION .....	33
3.12.1	EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....	33
3.12.2	PROPOSED ACTION .....	35
3.12.3	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....	35
3.13	UTILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES .....	35
3.13.1	EXISTING ENVIRONMENT .....	35
3.13.2	PROPOSED ACTION .....	36
3.13.3	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE .....	36
3.14	POTENTIAL FOR GENERATING SUBSTANTIAL CONTROVERSY .....	36
<b>4.0</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>43</b>

## FIGURES

- Figure 1 Site Vicinity Map  
Figure 2 Site Map  
Figure 3 Existing South Florida National Cemetery Layout  
Figure 4 FEMA Map  
Figure 5 Soils Map

## TABLES (within text)

- Table 3.9 Threatened and Endangered Species in Palm Beach County  
Table 4.1.1 Summary of Impact Analysis

## APPENDICES

- APPENDIX A AGENCY AND POTENTIALLY AFFECTED PARTY CONSULTATION  
APPENDIX B CONSISTENCY STATEMENT  
APPENDIX C PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY  
REPORT - VA CEMETERY SITE, LAKE WORTH, FLORIDA  
APPENDIX D ALTA/NSPS LAND TITLE SURVEY  
APPENDIX E PHASE II ENVIRONMENTAL SITE ASSESSMENT PROPOSED LAND  
ACQUISITION APPROXIMATELY 25-ACRES OF LAND EAST SIDE OF  
PARK LAND EAST, LAKE WORTH FLORIDA  
APPENDIX F REPRESENTATIVE SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This Environmental Assessment (EA) identifies, describes, and evaluates potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed Veterans Affairs (VA) site acquisition for future expansion of the South Florida National Cemetery. This EA summarizes the Proposed Action, as well as the No Action Alternative.

Site-specific analysis was conducted in accordance with the *National Environmental Policy Act* of 1969 (NEPA) (42 United States Code 4321 et seq.), the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) “Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA” (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500–1508), 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).

### **1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors veterans and their families with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to the nation. The NCA maintains approximately 3.3 million gravesites at 134 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers’ lots and monument sites, in 40 states and Puerto Rico (VA 2014a). The VA’s Office of Construction and Facility Management’s mission is to advance the VA’s mission in support of the nation’s veterans by planning, designing, constructing, and acquiring major facilities; and setting design and construction standards (VA, National Cemetery Administration, 2015).

Of the 134 national cemeteries, the original South Florida National Cemetery (SFNC) covers approximately 333 acres in area, was opened for burials in 2007, and was formally dedicated on March 9, 2008. Since its inaugural opening, the South Florida National Cemetery has provided 40 to 70 burial services per week.

The existing South Florida National Cemetery was initially designed to serve veterans’ needs in the area for up to 50 years. Since inauguration, the VA has provided memorial services for

thousands of veterans per year at the South Florida National Cemetery since its dedication, and the VA projects the annual average burial rate will continue to increase over time. In 2014, the VA purchased an additional 19.82 acres adjacent to the southwest corner of the cemetery for use in future expansion, bringing the current cemetery to approximately 353 acres in area; however, currently only the original 333 acres have been included within the developmental Master Plan.

In March 2014, an *Environmental Assessment for Acquisition of 20-acres of Land for Future Expansion of the South Florida National Cemetery*, was prepared by Barnes, Ferland and Associates, Inc. The 20-acre site is located at 6905 Park Lane Road, in suburban Lake Worth, Florida. The EA evaluated the acquisition of the property, and the No Action Alternative, and found that there were no significant adverse environmental impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Action.

The general vicinity of the project area, including the location of the existing South Florida National Cemetery and the 20-acre expansion area acquired in 2014, is depicted in **Figure 1**, and the precise boundaries of the existing SFNC are shown in **Figure 2**. Current and future uses within the original cemetery bounds was incorporated into a design Master Plan. A copy of the current Site Layout is included as **Figure 3**.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide additional acreage to accommodate future long-term expansion needs of the SFNC and meet the burial and memorial needs of future generations of veterans in South Florida. In order to accomplish these objectives, an addition to the South Florida National Cemetery in Lake Worth, Florida is proposed. Specifically, the VA is proposing to acquire four contiguous land parcels, totaling approximately 25.07 acres in area. The parcels are located at 6652 and 6329 Park Lane East, Lake Worth, Palm Beach County, Florida, and these parcels adjoin the central portion of the SFNC along the western boundary.

The Proposed Action discussed herein is for land acquisition, and currently, no preliminary design for any improvements to this proposed addition to the SFNC have been developed for these parcels, and no construction schedules have been formulated. Notwithstanding, it is understood that the intended use is to be an expansion of the existing features; as such, would

include the establishment of pre-placed crypt gravesites, and potentially other features such as the following: columbarium wall structures, visitor's areas, roadways, parking, a memorial monument area, and landscaped areas. Any future design modifications would be intended to expand both the capacity and aesthetics of the existing national cemetery.

If the Proposed Action is implemented, the funding for acquisition is planned for Fiscal Year 2018. The addition to cemetery would require connections to service for water, wastewater, electricity, and communication, all currently available in the vicinity of the site, and specifically at the adjacent South Florida National Cemetery. For the purpose of this Environmental Assessment, it is assumed that all utility services would ultimately be connected through the existing SFNC, and not from the right-of-way of Park Lane East, which borders the property to the west.

If the Proposed Action discussed herein is implemented, subsequent funding for incorporation of the Master Plan would likely be provided from the operating budget of the VA, construction would likely be funded by the VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA). The grounds and facilities would be designed for year-round visitation/operation, as appropriate to south Florida's climate.

### **1.3 NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The need for expansion of the existing cemetery is dually generated by diminishing space available to accommodate veterans who choose to be buried in a veteran's cemetery, as well as a growing and aging veteran population in the area. An aging population of veterans, especially those from the World War II/Korean War era, reside in South Florida. Significant veteran's services are available in the area, coupled with the favorable climate, making the south Florida area attractive to retirees in general, and as applicable to this matter, retired veterans and their spouses specifically.

The need for expansion to the existing SFNC is generated by the current population of veterans in South Florida and projected death rates, and the need to accommodate the average annual number of veterans who choose to be buried in a veteran's cemetery. The service area for the South Florida National Cemetery is 75 miles, which extends south to Miami-Dade County, up the

Treasure Coast past Fort Pierce, and inland past Lake Okeechobee beyond Clewiston, and easterly to the coastal areas of Lantana, Lake Worth, West Palm Beach, and other area municipalities. Since the opening of the South Florida National Cemetery in 2008, Florida's population has grown by almost ¼ million people per year, and continues to have the highest percentage of the population over age 65 (nearly 20 percent) of any state (University of Florida, 2013). The South Florida National Cemetery is one of five national cemeteries in Florida and is key to supporting the needs of veterans in the greater South Florida area.

Since its inaugural opening, the South Florida National Cemetery has provided 40 to 70 burial services per week, and this number is expected to continually grow with an aging population in the service area. At its initial design level, the service capacity of the cemetery was 50 years (circa 2058), and it is the current estimation of the VA that this capacity will be reached prior to that date. The proposed expansion would accommodate the memorial service requirements for hundreds of eligible veterans and/or their eligible family members, and is expected to add up several years of memorial services to deserving veterans. An expanded facility would also add to the grandeur and aesthetic quality of the SFNC.

In order to meet these needs, acquisition of additional lands for future expansion is proposed. The VA determined that an EA is the appropriate level of documentation for the grant approval supporting the proposed veterans' cemetery expansion.

#### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

Implementation of the Proposed Action would be for the funding and acquisition of the site. Following development, the site would provide additional memorial service areas, which also may allow for concurrent memorial services while maintaining a respectful distance from each other within the SFNC.

Supplementing the existing facility would allow the VA to continue to meet the needs of South Florida veterans for beyond the point at which the SFNC would reach capacity; therefore, providing additional services to veterans and their spouses in the South Florida area for years to come.

## **1.5 SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires federal agencies to evaluate and consider environmental impacts for federal projects. The level of documentation required depends on the level of potential impacts. Certain actions meet the definition of categorical exclusion (CATEX); which are a category of actions that the given agency has determined do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. The list of CATEX actions are agency specific and are specified in their implementing regulations (VA, 2010). If the action does not clearly meet any of these criteria, or seemingly does but has "extraordinary circumstances," then it must be evaluated through completion of an EA. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is only prepared for proposed actions that are anticipated to significantly impact the environment.

The VA has determined that an EA is the appropriate level of documentation for the funding approval supporting this proposed expansion of the South Florida National Cemetery facility. An EA is intended to be a concise public document that provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining the significance of the action and whether to prepare an EIS; aids an agency's compliance with NEPA when no environmental impact statement is necessary; and facilitates preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement when one is necessary. If the analysis finds there are no significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) can be issued concluding the NEPA process. The FONSI is a legally binding document. If there is significant impact and/or public controversy, the NEPA process continues on through issuance of a Notice of Intent (NOI) and completion of an EIS.

In carrying out its mission, the VA intends to:

- ensure that practical means and measures are used to protect, restore, and enhance the quality of the human environment;
- avoid or minimize adverse environmental consequences;
- preserve historical, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage; and
- to achieve a balance between the use and development of resources within the sustained capacity of the ecological system involved.

As part of the EA process, a combined agency scoping letter was submitted to federal, state, and local agencies through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Clearinghouse, and well as directly to the Florida State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The list of agencies contacted and copies of the scoping letters are presented in **Appendix A**. These letters provided details about the project site and Proposed Action, and requested the agencies review the information regarding the proposed project as it relates to their respective area of jurisdiction and/or expertise. Copies of response correspondences received from these agencies are also included in **Appendix A**.

The VA's NEPA guidance states that the EA process includes a 30-day public comment period on the Draft EA, which starts with the publication of a Notice of Availability (NOA). The NOA for the Draft EA was published in the Palm Beach Post on December 13-15, 2017, a newspaper of significant circulation in the geographical area of the Proposed Action. The Final EA was available online and at the Palm Beach County Library, Main Branch. No public comments on the Draft EA were received during the comment period.

This EA has been completed pursuant to the NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and VA regulations (38 CFR 26.4[a]).

The Federal Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) requires Federal agencies carrying out activities subject to the Act to provide a "consistency determination" to the relevant state agency. The Proposed Action lies within an area subject to the Act; therefore, the VA's Consistency Determination is contained in the Consistency Statement in **Appendix B**. This EA, including the Consistency Statement, was submitted to the Florida State Clearinghouse for a multi-agency review. The Florida Department of Community Affairs, with input from state and county agencies, determined that the Proposed Action is consistent with the Florida Coastal Management Program (see **Appendix A**).

## **1.6 RELATED INVESTIGATIONS AND DOCUMENTS**

As part of the evaluation of the property, and concurrent with this EA the following documents have been prepared for the project site:

- *Preliminary Environmental Assessment Summary Report VA Cemetery Site- Lake Worth, Florida*, prepared by Cardno, Inc. (July 2016);
- *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, Proposed Addition to South Florida National Cemetery*, prepared by ATC Group Services, LLC (July 2016);
- *Geotechnical Engineering Report - Addition to the South Florida National Cemetery*, prepared by ATC Group Services, LLC;
- *Appraisal Report (2)*, CBRE, August 2016;
- *ALTA/NSPS Land Title Survey*, prepared by PM Surveying, West Palm Beach, Florida (January 2016); and
- *Phase II Environmental Site Assessment Proposed Land Acquisition Approximately 25-Acres of Land East Side of Park Lane East, Lake Worth Florida*, prepared by TTL Associates, Inc. (August 4, 2017).

A copy of the *Preliminary Environmental Assessment Summary Report VA Cemetery Site – Lake Worth, Florida*, is included in **Appendix C**, a copy of the *ALTA/NSPS Land Title Survey* for the property is included in **Appendix D**, and a copy of the *Phase II Environmental Site Assessment Proposed Land Acquisition Approximately 25-Acres of Land East Side of Park Lane East, Lake Worth Florida* is included in **Appendix E**. Findings of the biological and cultural evaluations (*Preliminary Environmental Assessment Summary Report VA Cemetery Site- Lake Worth, Florida*), the *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, Proposed Addition to South Florida National Cemetery*, the *Geotechnical Engineering Report - Addition to the South Florida National Cemetery*, and the *Appraisal Report(s)* are maintained as part of the environmental record and are summarized herein; however, for space considerations are not appended to this EA. These documents are also available for public review, upon request, by contacting the Department of Veterans Affairs - Office of Construction & Facility Management; 425 I Street NW, Suite 6W417B, Washington, DC 20001; Attention: Mr. Fernando Fernández. Mr. Fernández can also be reached at (202) 632-5529.

## **2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

This chapter provides information on the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative, as well as basic assumptions related to the future development for the parcels in the event the Proposed Action is implemented, and the properties are subsequently incorporated into the SFNC Master Plan.

NEPA, and the regulations of CEQ and VA for implementing NEPA, require all reasonable alternatives to be rigorously explored and objectively evaluated. As part of the NEPA evaluation process for this project, the VA evaluated two options, those evaluated within this EA are the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. As the land surrounding the existing SFNC is privately held, and these parcels were offered for sale, no other reasonable alternative action was evaluated and eliminated for further consideration.

### **2.1 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

NEPA requires that environmental consequences associated with the Proposed Action and the alternative to the Proposed Action be identified in this document. This section describes the two alternatives evaluated in this document: the Proposed Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative.

The project area is adjacent to a much larger federally-owned parcel, which comprises the existing National Cemetery. This Proposed Action would be funded by a grant application through the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); as such, this action prompting compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (38 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 39). The funding, procurement of the subject parcels, reasonable and likely cemetery construction and expansion activities, and its ultimate upkeep and maintenance constitute the Proposed Action.

### 2.1.1 Background

For the purposes of this EA, the proposed VA Expansion of the South Florida National Cemetery consists of the procurement four abutting agricultural land parcels that, when combined, total approximately 25.07 acres in area, and their ultimate assimilation into the existing cemetery Master Plan. Three of the parcels encompass 5.01 acres in area each and are currently owned and occupied by Abell's Nursery. The remaining, northernmost parcel covers 10.04 acres in area, and is owned and occupied by California Growers. All of the parcels are zoned AR (Agricultural Residential). The property has historically been undeveloped land prior to its occupancy by a greenhouse and nursery, used for ornamental plant cultivation since the early 1990s.

As previously noted, the general vicinity of the project area, including the location of the existing South Florida National Cemetery, is depicted in **Figure 1**, and the precise boundaries of the project area are shown in **Figure 2** (see **Section 1.1**). Representative photographs of the properties are included in **Appendix F**.

### 2.1.2 Proposed Action

The Proposed Action specifically would be the acquisition of an addition of approximately 25.07 acres of property located due west of the existing South Florida National Cemetery. 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 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.

Currently, the general area of the Proposed Action is serviced with electrical, roadways and other key infrastructures, each of which are in place. Electrical and telephone services are available to

the nurseries via overhead services along Park Lane East. Currently, those facilities and other properties along Park Lane Road utilize on-site wells and/or septic systems for water and wastewater services. This proximity of services and utilities to the proposed expansion area is beneficial, minimizing the need for off-site improvements to service potential future projects. For the proposal of any future developments, a separate EA addressing the impacts to the surrounding area will be conducted.

Interment areas and landscaped components would be irrigated to ensure they maintain their intended aesthetic qualities. Landscaping would be provided throughout the project site to accentuate certain components and to hide or mask others. Trees would be included for aesthetic value and to provide shade. Plants and trees chosen for landscaping would consist of native species that are tolerant of the local climate and site conditions. The improved areas of the project site would be designed with an irrigation system suitable for the placed landscaping. An irrigation source may be ponds or irrigation wells, and the existing on-site ponds may or may not be used in some fashion and incorporated into the Master Plan. Certain large native trees would be preserved to the extent practicable, provided they correspond to proposed natural areas, and these areas may not be irrigated.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would require key utilities to support the public restroom and irrigation system. Domestic water and sanitary sewer service would be provided to any restrooms added within the area of the Proposed Action. Currently, potable water is supplied to both the nurseries and the main cemetery via on-site wells, and sanitary wastewaters from the administrative buildings and public restrooms is disposed of on-site via septic systems, and any improvements on the proposed site needing these services would be addressed in a similar fashion. For the purposes of this evaluation, it is assumed that all services (electrical, and/or telephone) will be provided via expansion of existing services within, and connections to, those provided to the current SFNC, or the overhead utilities on Park Lane East. Municipal water and sewer services are not available at the SFNC; but would be provided via wells and septic systems. Florida Power & Light is the current provider of electrical service to the area.

The new construction and new parking areas would be designed to manage storm water by the construction of new appropriately sized and permitted storm water retention areas, and

appropriate permits would be acquired with the concurrence and approval of the South Florida Water Management District.

Construction activities would likely be funded by the VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and will be subject to meeting all of the requirements of availability and approval of the modified design.

## **2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

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 were the interment needs of veterans and their family members is underserved.

## **2.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER STUDY**

Given the capacity limitations of the SFNC, the VA is and will continue to pursue reasonable expansion opportunities to the cemetery, as expansion opportunities arise. As the land surrounding the existing SFNC is privately held, and these parcels were offered for sale, no other reasonable alternative action was evaluated and eliminated for further consideration at this particular time.

### **3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

This section describes the characteristics of the existing natural and man-made environment that could be affected by the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. This section of the EA evaluates the following resource areas: aesthetics, air quality, noise, solid wastes and hazardous materials, water resources, floodplains, wetlands, and Coastal Management, transportation systems, socioeconomics and environmental justice, biological resources, cultural resources, land use, geology, soils and farmland protection, utilities and community services, as well as the potential for generating substantial controversy.

This section establishes the basis for assessing impacts of the alternatives on the affected environment provided below, which are also summarized in **Section 4.0**.

#### **3.1 AESTHETICS**

##### **3.1.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

The project site consists of four parcels of land totaling 25.07 acres and developed with commercial ornamental plant nurseries. The property is located in a mostly rural area and situated immediately west of the existing South Florida National Cemetery. The nursery contains rows of plants and bushes, utility shed, seven shade houses, and two irrigation ponds. Several unpaved pathways divide the rows throughout the property and provide a border from the surrounding area. Features surrounding the project site that contribute to the visual character and scenic quality of the area are other nurseries a number of private residences, horse ranches, the existing national cemetery, agricultural fields, and undeveloped land. Overhead transmission wires run along the two-lane Park Lane East, which generally forms the western border of the property.

The project site maintains varying visibility based on the density of trees to drivers on Park Lane East, to the residences south of the property and across Park Lane East, and to agricultural

personnel located north of the property. Sources of nighttime light at the nursery are security lights for the utility shed building. Nearby residences have relatively minimal outdoor lights.

There are no designated wild and scenic rivers or scenic roadways in the project vicinity.

### 3.1.2 PROPOSED ACTION

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.

Heavy equipment would be used for grading and other construction. The presence of heavy equipment and unfinished stages of site preparation and construction would temporarily impact the visual quality of the area for visitors to the cemetery, as well as those residents also Park Lane East. However, the construction area would be spatially separate from the previously developed cemetery sections and activities would be conducted with sensitivity for interment services. Additionally, farm equipment and trucks associated with the nurseries are common along the roadway.

### 3.1.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

No action would leave existing buildings to fall into disrepair and become aesthetically displeasing.

## **3.2 AIR QUALITY**

### **3.2.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

#### *Regional Climate*

Weather and climate are important influences on air resources. The property is located in Palm Beach County approximately 10 ½ miles west of the Atlantic Ocean, and at an elevation of 15 to 20 feet above sea level. According to the Köppen climate system, the climate of Palm Beach County is classified as equatorial monsoon. All average monthly temperatures are greater than 64 degrees Fahrenheit with a pronounced wet season and short dry season. The highest annual temperature occurs just prior to the rainy season. September is the wettest month and February is the driest. Climate data from the Palm Beach Gardens, 9 ½ miles northeast of the property, show that average annual temperatures are between 64.8 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter and 81.1 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. The average annual precipitation is 61.32 inches.

#### *Existing Emission Sources*

The site does not have any current emission sources. Electrical power for lighting and cooling to the existing structures are supplied from the local utility service.

#### *Regulatory Standards and Governing Agencies*

The Clean Air Act (CAA), as amended in 1977 and 1990, provides the basis for regulating air pollution to the atmosphere. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set air quality standards for six “criteria” pollutants: carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), sulfur oxides (SO<sub>x</sub>), measured as sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), lead (Pb), and particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter less than or equal to 10 micrometers (PM<sub>10</sub>) and those 2.5 micrometers or less (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). These standards are the cornerstone of the CAA. Although not directly enforceable, they are the benchmark for the establishment of emission limitations by the states for the pollutants the EPA determines may endanger public health or welfare.

The Florida Department of Health, Division of Environmental Public Health, Air and Solid Waste Program, is responsible for issuing and enforcing CAA Title V Air Operation Permits within

Palm Beach County. No CAA Title V Air Operation Permits have been issued for the site nor the neighboring SFNC. The USEPA tracks compliance with the air quality standards through designation of a particular region as “attainment” or “non-attainment.” The site is located in Palm Beach County which currently meets the EPA air quality standards for all criteria pollutants (40 CFR part 50, December 28, 2015). The county was formerly non-attainment for ozone but is currently in maintenance of attainment.

The principal pollutant expected from site development would be particulate matter (*i.e.* from site clearing and grading activities. According to the *Air Monitoring Report*, prepared by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Air Resource Management-Office of Air Monitoring, the nearest air monitoring station is located at 980 Crestwood Boulevard, in Royal Palm Beach, approximately 10 miles to the northwest. According to the report, the average annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> reading at the Royal Palm Beach location was 5.6 micrograms per cubic meter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) in 2012 (the most recent annual data available), which is significantly below the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) of 35  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .

### 3.2.2 PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, acquisition would have limited impact on air quality, related to the removal of private property by the nurseries. 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 adoption 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.

### 3.2.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, the property would not be purchased, and changes to the private operational activities at the site would occur.

### 3.3 NOISE

#### 3.3.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The meaning of noise for this analysis is undesirable sound that interferes with speech communication and hearing or is otherwise bothersome (unwanted sound). In June 1980, the Federal Interagency Committee on Urban Noise published guidelines (FICUN 1980) relating day-night average sound level (DNL) values to compatible land uses. Most Federal agencies have identified 65 decibels (dB) DNL as a criterion that protects those most affected by noise and that can often be achieved on a practical basis.

The nurseries are located in a quiet rural setting with agricultural and low-to-medium density residential land uses surrounding the site. Sensitive noise receptors include hospitals, schools, churches, cemeteries, libraries, and public parks. The nearest sensitive receptors to the site and the existing cemetery include the following:

- Hospitals – The nearest hospital is the Bethesda Hospital West near Sun Valley, Florida, approximately 3 ½ miles southeast of the site. Nursing and rehabilitation centers are also located in Aberdeen, Florida (approximately 4 ½ miles southeast).
- Schools – The nearest schools include Wellington Preparatory School (approximately three miles northeast) and Manatee Elementary School (approximately four miles east).
- Churches and cemeteries – The nearest church or cemetery, aside from the adjacent South Florida National Cemetery itself, is the Saint Therese De Lisieux church (approximately three miles northwest). A funeral home is located approximately five miles southeast.
- Libraries – The nearest library is the Palm Beach County Library (West Boynton Beach Branch) is approximately five miles to the northwest.
- Public parks – The nearest public park is the Wellington Village Park (approximately 3 ½ miles northwest).

Based upon these distances, none of these receptors are within close proximity of the proposed acquisition.

Other potentially sensitive noise receptors include neighboring residences, the nearest of which is immediately adjacent to the south. Additional neighboring residences are situated west and northwest beyond Park Lane East.

The principal sources of noise in the area include relatively light traffic along Park Lane East and on the nursery property, periodic construction and maintenance activities, and the relatively rare ceremonial M-16 rifle salutes from the adjoining national cemetery to the east. Currently, ceremonial M-16 rifle salutes (typically, 3 volleys and rarely up to 21) average about 10 to 15 per month (personal correspondence with Amy Pena, Program Specialist, South Florida National Cemetery), and do not always occur at the grave site, they may be at the main facilities of the cemetery. The SFNC does not have a residing Veterans Service Organization (VSO) to assist the Military Honors Teams during the ceremonial salutes. As a result, the only services receiving the volleys are for retirees, those who died on active duty, and those killed in action (personal correspondence with James Mitchum, SFNC Cemetery Director). Therefore, the noise from such volleys are not considered significant.

### 3.3.2 PROPOSED ACTION

If the Proposed Action were implemented, the noise from the operations of the nurseries would be eliminated following acquisition. 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 (personal correspondence with Glenn Madderom, Chief Cemetery Development and Improvement Service, National Cemetery Administration).

### 3.3.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, cemetery expansion would not occur, and no additional noise impacts would result. While not part of the Proposed Action, ceremonial M-16 rifle salutes would

continue within the existing cemetery until burial and memorial service capacity is reached, and grounds maintenance activities would continue thereafter.

### **3.4 SOLID WASTES AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS**

#### **3.4.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

Solid waste is generated by nursery operations on a routine basis. A septic tank is located on the south-central portion of the site and serves the office building. The remainder of the site is without sanitary sewer and septic connections. Additional solid waste generally consists of routine office waste, dead plants and plant debris, and container waste associated with pest control and fertilizing activities. Solid waste is collected on an as-needed basis and transferred to a municipal solid waste landfill located off-site.

Concurrent with this assessment, a *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment* (ESA) was completed by ATC Group Services, LLC (ATC), which identified minimal quantities of hazardous materials are stored at the site and consist of pesticides, insecticides, fertilizers, and paint. Hazardous waste requiring disposal were not identified on site, and no *Recognized Environmental Conditions*, as defined in the ASTM International (ASTM) Standard E1527-13. The Phase I ESA did note that while no physical or regulatory evidence suggestive of contamination or misuse of agricultural chemicals was encountered. In the event that future development necessitates soil removal and/or dewatering (to control groundwater levels), then appropriate screening of soil and monitoring of groundwater effluent for agricultural-related contaminants would appear warranted. ATC also notes that any planned dewatering would be subject to agency approval and permitting requirements at that time.

Small quantities of hydraulic and lubricating oils are stored on the site, along with diesel and gasoline fuels which are stored throughout the site in Aboveground Storage Tanks (ASTs) ranging in size from 100 to 300 gallons. Specifically, ATC observed a diesel fuel AST associated with a pump station located on the northeastern portion of the northernmost property parcel. This tank has an estimated capacity of less than 100 gallons and did not show overt signs of leakage. The south, middle parcel within the Abell's Nursery contains a 275-gallon gasoline AST and approximate 300-gallon diesel fuel AST within a common concrete block containment along the

banks of the eastern canal that traverses the property. An overhead canopy is provided for the common containment that also extends over the canal pump station. Both tanks are constructed with steel and showed signs of rusting; however, both tanks appeared to be intact. The canal pump station also contains a reservoir tank that is estimated to be less than 300 gallons in size. The pond pump station on the southern middle parcel also contains a similarly-sized reservoir tank.

Based upon the findings of the Phase I ESA, a Phase II ESA was conducted on behalf of the VA. The scope of work included the completion of eight soils borings (identified as GP-1 through GP-8), and the installation of temporary monitoring wells at four of these locations spatially separated throughout the properties. Soil samples and representative groundwater samples were collected at these locations and analyzed by a certified analytical laboratory for the presence of select organochlorine pesticides and chlorinated herbicides. The eight collected soil samples were also analyzed for the presence of arsenic.

Analytical results found a single organochlorine pesticide 4,4 Dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene (4,4 DDE) in two soil borings completed at the Keaveny property. Arsenic was also detected in four of the soils samples, at concentrations identified as “typical of naturally occurring levels in sandy soil.”

Analytical results found several organochlorine pesticides in groundwater samples collected at the Keaveny property, with Aldrin, chlordane, endsulfan I, endrin, and heptachlor detected at concentrations in excess of Groundwater and/or Surface Water Cleanup Target Levels (CTLs), as defined in Chapter 62777 of the Florida Administrative Code (FAC). At the Able Nursery property, a single organochlorine pesticide (4,4-DDD was detected at a concentration “slightly in excess of the Surface Water CTL).

The Phase II ESA concluded that “it appears the shallow groundwater” at the properties have “been impacted by organochlorine pesticides at low concentrations.”

#### 3.4.2 PROPOSED ACTION

The regulated materials and fuels that are currently stored at the nursery are expected to be removed by the nursery prior to the property assimilation 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 during 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, and 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 generation 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 onsite in accordance with site design specifications. Excess soils (without debris) could be reutilized offsite, 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 the Phase II ESA, the presence and/or potential presence of pesticides within soil and groundwater would have to be addressed in regard to the handling of these materials, as well as it related to human/worker exposure. Assuming adequate soils and groundwater management and 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 are expected to have only a minor adverse impact to the development.

#### 3.4.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, cemetery expansion would not occur, the removal of existing hazardous wastes (pesticides, insecticides, fertilizers, and paint) from nursery operations would not be required, and potentially impacted soils and/or groundwater would not be disturbed. Without the cemetery expansion, construction-related solid waste and hazardous material

generation would also not occur. Additional, without implementation, the need for management or potential for exposure of pesticides in soil or groundwater would not occur. As cemetery interments would also not be completed on the proposed expansion parcels, waste would not be generated, as redevelopment would not occur.

### **3.5 WATER RESOURCES**

#### **3.5.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

The site is located in the Lake Worth Lagoon-Palm Beach Coast watershed. The site gently slopes west and southwest, and the area's drainage is greatly influenced by the Strazzulla Tract Wetlands (part of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge to the west of the proposed site), as well as nearby drainage canals, and ultimately, the Lake Worth Lagoon. Site drainage is generally good, with few areas of water retention. Storm water runoff at the property is collected within two ponds located on the central portion of the property and is reused for nursery irrigation. In addition to the canal along the eastern boundary of the site, there are two small man-made irrigation ponds in the southern portion of the site. A small intermittent lateral swale runs north to south through the southern portion of the site. This swale appears to be used to collect runoff from the irrigated rows of nursery plants. A larger east-west trending ditch is present in the center of the site. Canals in the area are managed by the Lake Worth Drainage District.

The site overlies the surficial aquifer system, mainly used for domestic, commercial, or small municipal supplies. The surficial aquifer system is generally unconfined and is made up of mostly unconsolidated sand, shelly sand, and shell. The aquifer thickness is typically less than 50 feet but can range up to 400 feet. Unconfined groundwater is expected to be first encountered within 10 feet or less below the surface and, considering the flat topography of the surrounding area, local gradients will be principally affected by the proximity of the nearest drainage feature. Notwithstanding, the regional groundwater gradient is west to east from the Refuge towards the Lake Worth Lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean. Situated beneath the surficial aquifer system, the site overlies over the Floridian Aquifer system which encompasses the vast majority of Florida and portions of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina.

The property maintains one, 100-foot deep well that draws from the surficial aquifer system. Another well is also maintained that draws water from the lake system. The property also maintains water pumps that draw from the eastern traversing canal.

Wastewater on the site consists of domestic sanitary sewage from routine operations (toilets and sinks). The waste water is discharged into a septic system associated with the on-site building.

### 3.5.2 PROPOSED ACTION

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 aesthetics 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 practices would have to consider the potential presence of identified impacts 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.

### 3.5.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, cemetery expansion would not occur and no impacts to hydrology or water quality would result.

### **3.6 FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS AND COASTAL MANAGEMENT**

#### **3.6.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

According to information provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA Map dated October 15, 1982), 100 percent of the property is located within Zone B, areas of 500-year flood; areas of 100-year flood with average depths of less than one foot or with drainage areas less than 1 square mile; and areas protected by levees from 100-year floods. An area inundated by 0.2% annual chance flooding.

Executive Order (EO) 11988, *Floodplain Management*, requires each agency to evaluate the potential effects of any action it may take in a floodplain. The objective of EO 11988 is to avoid to the extent practicable the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative. To comply with EO 11988, the South Florida National Cemetery must consider alternatives to avoid adverse effects and incompatible development in the floodplain, and when no practicable alternative exists, design the action to minimize the potential harm to the floodplain.

The proposed construction at the nursery would be located within the 500-year floodplain (Zone B) (**Figure 4**). All unimproved portions of the complex lie at an elevation of less than 18 feet above mean sea level (MSL).

Concurrent with this assessment and on behalf of the VA, a site evaluation was completed by a certified professional wetland scientist from Cardno, Inc. (Cardno), which indicated that there are no jurisdictional wetlands within nursery areas of the site; however, a review of historical imagery previously indicated that there was a mixture of wetlands and uplands within the site boundaries. Significant drainage improvements have occurred which have largely reduced the presence of wetlands. The site has been completely cleared and partially filled, and there are no naturally occurring vegetative wetland associations present.

According to the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), three wetland soil associations are mapped on site. Two of the classifications, Boca fine sand and Riviera fine sand, are identified as hydric soils by the NRCS. Hydric soils include soils types that are associated with

wetland communities under normal circumstances. The combination of site drainage and fill activities (dating back several decades) indicates that the NRCS soil mapping was based on historical conditions. A sampling of current site conditions showed that the upper 10 to 12 inches of the soil profile consists of shell and rock fill. While the NRCS map also shows the outline of a water feature; this feature was not observed in Cardno's review of the historical imagery, therefore, Cardno was unsure of the basis for this classification (Cardno, Inc. 2016). The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) was enacted in 1972 to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, to restore and enhance the resources of the nation's coastal zone. Coastal States are encouraged to develop state coastal management programs, and comprehensively manage and balance competing uses of and impacts to coastal resources. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) approves coastal management programs, with the Florida Coastal Management Program (FCMP) approved by NOAA in 1981. All counties within Florida lie within the designated coastal zone. The CZMA requires that any federal actions affecting any land or water use, or natural resource of the coastal be consistent with the enforceable policies of a state's federally approved coastal management program. Consistency evaluations in the State of Florida are conducted by the FDEP Coastal Management Program in coordination with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Florid State Clearinghouse. The VA's Consistency Determination is contained in the Consistency Statement in **Appendix B**.

### 3.6.2 PROPOSED ACTION

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.

### 3.6.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under No Action, cemetery expansion would not occur, and no impacts to floodplains or wetlands would result.

## 3.7 TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

### 3.7.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The site is located in a rural/suburban area of Palm Beach County. The nursery is accessed by both employees and visitors from the north-south trending Park Lane Road on the western side of the site. Park Lane East is a private road, with no maintenance provided by Palm Beach County; as such maintenance is the responsibility of adjacent landowners (personal correspondence with Ray Abell). At present, the on-site operations of each nursery employ 10 to 12 part-time or full-time staff. The main entrance and unpaved parking area is located on the southwest central portion of the site. Vehicle traffic along Park Lane East, in the vicinity of the site, is minimal and typically associated with residential and agricultural traffic. Traffic to the site is generally limited to the nursery operating hours of about 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM.

### 3.7.2 PROPOSED ACTION

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 provide access these parcels 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.

### 3.7.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action, cemetery expansion would not occur, and no transportation, construction, or parking impacts would result. As cemetery interments are reduced and eventually ended once the cemetery has reached capacity, traffic to and from the cemetery would decrease, resulting in a slight but beneficial impact (decrease) to the local transportation network, principally SR 441.

### **3.8 SOCIOECONOMICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

#### **3.8.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

According to the Economic Contributions of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Food Industries in Palm Beach County, Florida, dated May 19, 2016, the employment contributions of agriculture and natural resource related industries in Palm Beach County in 2014 were estimated at 158,976 fulltime and part-time jobs, representing over 18.71% of the County's total employment of 849,557 jobs. This includes secondary indirect and induced multiplier effects for sales of locally produced goods and services to markets outside the County that arise from supply chain activity and household income re-spending. The total output or industry sales revenue contributions were estimated at \$16.85 billion, representing 14.62% of total business output or sales in the County. Value added contributions or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) were estimated at \$9.50 billion, representing 13.88% of the County's total value added in 2014. Total labor income contributions, including employee wages, salaries, benefits and proprietor (business owner) income, were estimated at \$6.03 billion or 16.45% of the county's total.

Specifically, the total economic impact of greenhouses, nurseries, and floriculture production for Palm Beach County was over \$163.2 million with over 1,133 jobs supported. The direct impact on local income produced by wholesale nursery expenditures is \$126.9 million.

Currently, the two nurseries operating at the site of the Proposed Action cumulatively employ approximately two dozen full and part-time staff, as well as providing financial benefit from the operations to the business owners. According to Palm Beach County Property Appraisal records, based upon the assessed value of the parcels, and the agricultural designation, Palm Beach County receives approximately \$3,500 in property tax revenue from these parcels.

Executive Order 12898 "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations" was enacted in 1994 to focus Federal agencies attention on the environmental and human health conditions in minority communities and low-income communities with the goal of achieving environmental justice. Under this Executive Order, Federal agencies must identify and address the human health or environmental effects of its actions on minority and low-income populations.

In addition to the agricultural use of parcels, the area is surrounded by low-density houses, along Park Lane East, and to the south along Heritage Farms Road. Residential properties in the area are principally improved upon five-acre or greater lots, with assessed values averaging well above the median value for the county.

Concurrent with this assessment, Property Appraisals were completed on behalf of the VA for the subject parcels (CBRE, August 2016). Included within those appraisals, CBRE noted the 2016 Median Household Incomes for a 1-mile and a 3-mile, radius, respectively, were \$88,560 and \$86,037. According to the US Census Bureau, the Median Household Income for the US was \$72,641. While it is assumed the median US income has risen incrementally from 2014 to 2016, it appears the median income in the vicinity of the Proposed Action exceeds that of the US as a whole.

### 3.8.2 PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, acquisition of the parcels would result in a discontinuation of nursery operations, resulting in a loss of these jobs. As compared to the overall number of jobs in the county in the nursery service, these would account for less than two percent of the total. It is assumed the 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 that would be 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 lost from the discontinued operations of the nurseries.

Once the properties were to transfer 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. Based upon the information presented in Section 3.8.1, implementation of the Proposed Action is not expected to have a disproportional impact on minority or low-income populations.

### 3.8.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under No Action, cemetery expansion would not occur, and no adverse or beneficial impacts to socioeconomic conditions would result.

## 3.9 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

### 3.9.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

Concurrent with this EA, a limited survey of habitats present on the site was conducted on behalf of the VA in July 2016. The following is a summary of the findings presented in the *Preliminary Environmental Assessment Summary Report - VA Cemetery Site- Lake Worth, Florida*, dated July 2016, by Cardno. A copy of this report is included in **Appendix C**.

According to Cardno, a review of historical imagery indicates that there was a mixture of wetlands and uplands within the site boundaries; however, significant drainage improvements have occurred which largely reduced the presence of wetlands on the site.

Additionally, the site has been completely cleared and partially filled, and there are no naturally occurring vegetative associations present. The site is dominated by two separate active nursery operations. Approximately 24.4 acres of the site has been mapped as ornamentals, with the remaining 0.6 acres comprised of fringing land uses.

Available Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) data, obtained by Cardno, depicts the location of known occurrences of listed wildlife species within the vicinity of the site. There are no documented listed species occurrences within the site boundaries. Cardno's physical survey of the site confirmed that there does not appear to be potential habitat for listed species within the altered and disturbed nursery area on site. There may be limited foraging

within pond fringes and/or swales by wading bird species listed as a “Special Concern by the State of Florida” such as white ibis, snowy egrets, little blue herons, etc. In the event that there are impacts proposed to surface waters on-site, it has been Cardno’s experience that this type of limited foraging use typically does not require development of mitigation strategies.

As part of their permitting process, the USACE reviews surface water impacts as part of their assessment of potential project effects on the federally protected wood stork (*Mycteria americana*). Wood storks have specific nesting and foraging requirements. Nesting and roosting typically occurs within forested wetlands, while foraging typically occurs in shallow surface waters with limited herbaceous vegetation. For this site, it was Cardno’s opinion that there is no potential nesting habitat, and that foraging activities would be confined to the margins of the man-made ponds and the shallow open water/herbaceous portions of the canal along the eastern portion of the site.

In addition to those species observed or potentially on-site, a listing of all identified threatened and endangered species in Palm Beach County is included in **Table 3.9**, below.

<b>Table 3.9 Threatened &amp; Endangered Species in Palm Beach County</b>			
Common name	Scientific Name	Status	
		Federal	State
<b>Reptile/Amphibians</b>			
American alligator	<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	T (Threatened)	SSC (Species of Special Concern)
Hawksbill Sea Turtle	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	E (Endangered)	E
Atlantic loggerhead turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>	T	T
Leatherback Sea turtle	<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>	E	E
Atlantic green turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas mydas</i>	E	E
Eastern Indigo Snake	<i>Drymarachon corais couperi</i>	T	T
American crocodile	<i>Crocodylus acutus</i>	T	T
Gopher tortoise	<i>Gopherus polyphemus</i>	Candidate Species	
<b>Birds</b>			
Whooping crane	<i>Grus americana</i>	Experimental population	
Everglade snail kite	<i>Rostrhamus socialilis plumbeus</i>	E	E
Kirtland’s warbler	<i>Setophaga kirtlandii</i>	E	E
Red-cockaded woodpecker	<i>Picoides borealis</i>	E	E
Audubon’s crested caracara	<i>Olyborus plancus audubonii</i>	T	T
Piping plover	<i>Charadrius melodus</i>	T	T

<b>Table 3.9 Threatened &amp; Endangered Species in Palm Beach County</b>			
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>	<b>Status</b>	
		<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>
Florid scrub jay	<i>Aphelocoma coerulecens</i>	T	T
Wood stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>	E	E
Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus rufa</i>	T	T
<b>Mammals</b>			
Florida panther	<i>Puma concolor coryi</i>	E	E
West Indian (FL) manatee	<i>Trichechus manatus</i>	E	E
<b>Plants</b>			
Four-petal pawpaw	<i>Asimina tetramera</i>	E	E
Okeechobee gourd	<i>Cucurbita okeechobeensis</i>	E	E
Beach Jacquemontia	<i>Jacquemontia reclinata</i>	E	E
Tina polygala	<i>Polygala smallii</i>	E	E
<b>Lichens</b>			
Florida perforate cladonia	<i>Cladonia perforata</i>	E	E

### 3.9.2 PROPOSED ACTION

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 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.

Cardno’s report recommended that clarification of the potential use of the site by wood storks should be completed as part of the regulatory consultation for 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.

### 3.9.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, cemetery expansion would not occur and no impacts to wildlife or habitat would result.

### **3.10 CULTURAL RESOURCES**

#### **3.10.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

Cultural resources include both historic and prehistoric archaeological resources, as well as historic structures in the built environment. This impact analysis focused on sites and structures listed in, or eligible for nomination to, the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and the regulations (36 CFR Part 800) for implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. According to the National Register of Historical Places (National Park Service), there are no historical building on the site. However, all national cemeteries administered by the Veterans Administration are eligible for National Register listing as contributing resources because they have been designated by congress as primary memorials to the military history of the United States. Those areas within a designated national cemetery that have been used or prepared for the reception of the remains of veterans and their dependents, as well as any landscaped areas that immediately surround the graves may qualify.

According a report prepared by Cardno, titled *Preliminary Environmental Assessment Summary Report, VA Cemetery Site, Lake Worth, FL*, dated July 2016 (Cardno 2016), six cultural surveys have been conducted within one mile of the site. One of the surveys included the site; however, due to the nature of the survey (radio tower), it did not involve subsurface testing, and no cultural resources were identified. Additionally, no previously recorded cultural resources were located when the search was expanded to a mile outside of the site. A copy of Cardno's report is included in **Appendix C**.

The vegetative communities at the site include Basin Swamps, Floodplain Swamps, Hydric Hammocks, Wet Flatwoods, and Wet Prairies. Before widespread drainage for agriculture altered the hydrology of the region, inland Palm Beach County would have appeared as a patchwork of these different communities, each with a slightly different hydrological regime and soil series type. The soil within the project area consists of nearly level, poorly drained soil that typically occur in low broad flats and poorly defined drainage-ways. Unless drained, these soils are not suitable for cultivated crops or pasture (Cardno 2016). As such, the site was probably less than a favorable location for settlement prior to the completion of local and/or regional drainage projects earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### 3.10.2 PROPOSED ACTION

The 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 NRHP, would be found during construction activities at the site. As a result, no impacts to cultural resources are anticipated. In the event that cultural resources were identified, construction activities would be stopped in the area, and the SHPO would be consulted prior to the implementation of further construction activities.

### 3.10.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

No construction or cemetery operation in expansion areas would occur under the No Action alternative. Therefore, there would be no impact to cultural resources.

## **3.11 LAND USE**

### 3.11.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The site is located in unincorporated Palm Beach County and is primarily used for agricultural activities, including the cultivation of ornamental plants for resale. Two storm water retention ponds are situated on the central portion of the site and are utilized for irrigation of the onsite vegetation. During the site reconnaissance for this assessment, limited volumes of solid waste was observed on the central portion of the property and contained within a dumpster. On-site structures include multiple shade houses and a metal-framed office building that also contains an equipment storage warehouse, that contains various insecticides and pesticides. Furthermore, multiple diesel-powered pump stations and associated aboveground storage tanks were observed throughout the property. Other structures observed at the site include a water well, an open air shade house, and an irrigation canal which borders the eastern portion of the site.

Historically, the site has been undeveloped land since at least 1991, when agricultural tracts were depicted in the aerial photograph described in the *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment* (ATC, 2016), which was completed concurrent with this report. All four of the site parcels are located in unincorporated Palm Beach County and are zoned AR “Agricultural Residential.”

### 3.11.2 PROPOSED ACTION

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.

### 3.11.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, cemetery expansion would not occur and no impacts to land use would result.

## **3.12 GEOLOGY, SOILS, AND FARMLAND PROTECTION**

### 3.12.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The soils in the vicinity of the site were formed in material that overlies and is influenced by three major geologic formations. The oldest formation, the Caloosahatchee Marl, is of Pliocene Age and underlies all of Palm Beach County. It consists primarily of sand and varying amounts of shell, many of which are preserved unbroken. Although this formation is not exposed, in some places it lies close enough to the surface that it has been cut by the dredging of deeper canals.

The Anastasia Formation of Pleistocene Age underlies all the eastern third of Palm Beach County and presumably rests on the Caloosahatchee Formation. The Anastasia Formation consists primarily of shell and sand cemented into compact limestone known as coquina. The Anastasia Formation is exposed near the water line at several places along the coast.

Pamlico sand of the late Pleistocene Age covers the entire county east of the Everglades and is the basic material from which most of the mineral soils have developed. In this part of the county, the Pamlico Formation is a terrace that extends up to about 25 feet above mean sea level (University of Florida Press, 1991).

The most extensive soil on the site consists of Boca fine sand. In general, this soil unit is a nearly level, poorly drained, and has loamy subsoil that is underlain by fractured limestone at a depth of

24 to 40 inches. This soil is on broad, low flats and in poorly-defined drainageways between the Everglades and coastal ridge. Under natural conditions, the water table is within 10 inches of the surface for 2 to 4 months.

Smaller amounts of Riviera sand are also located at the site. This soil unit is a nearly level, poorly drained soil that has loamy subsoil. This soil is typically located within shallow well-defined depressions. This soil type is covered with up to two feet of water for more than six months each year; however, the soil at the site has been artificially drained and filled to improve their agricultural productivity.

Both soils on the site are highly corrosive to uncoated steel and concrete. Like most of the soils in this area of Florida, they require intensive management to produce and sustain landscaping.

Additionally, the protection of farmland to maintain the agricultural production capacity of the United States is established in the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) (7 USC 4201). The US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA NRCS) is in charge of implementing this policy. The USDA NRCS uses farmland classification to identify soils according to their suitability for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Prime farmland is defined as “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimum inputs of fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, and labor, and without intolerable soil erosion.” Unique farmlands are defined as “land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops. Unique farmland has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high-quality and/or high yields of a specific crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods”.

According to the USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey, the Riviera sand is identified as farmland of unique importance and the Boca fine sand is characterized as farmland of local importance and (USDA NRCS 2013).

A copy of the Soils Map is included as **Figure 5**.

### 3.12.2 PROPOSED ACTION

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 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.

### 3.12.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

No construction or cemetery operation in the expansion area would occur under the No Action alternative. Therefore, there would be no impact to the geology and soils at the site.

## **3.13 UTILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

### 3.13.1 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The site currently receives electrical service from Florida Power & Light Company [ATC 2016]. No natural gas service or no municipal potable water is currently supplied to the site. A deep well provides water to the office building for toilets and sinks. The well water is reportedly suitable for domestic uses, but the current operators utilize bottled water for consumption. The well reportedly has only been tested for hardness (ATC, 2016). A septic tank is located on the south-central portion of the site and serves the office building. The remainder of the site is without sanitary sewer and septic connections.

Palm Beach County Public Utilities have public water and sewer mains along Boynton Beach Boulevard, and more than a mile from the property. Both of these lines could be extended to the site if necessary but would be cost prohibitive. Ground and surface water are currently available for landscape irrigation at the site.

The site lies within Palm Beach County and lies within the south region of the Palm Beach County School District. The nearest schools include Coral Reef Elementary School, Woodlands Middle School, and Park Vista Community High School.

Palm Beach County provides fire and rescue services to the area in which the site is located. County Fire & Rescue Station No. 48 services the site and is designated as first responders. The closest hospital is Bethesda Hospital West, approximately 3 ½ miles southeast of the site. Currently, the South Substation of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office (PBCSO) serves the vicinity of the site.

#### 3.13.2 PROPOSED ACTION

Acquisition of the parcels would have no impact upon utilities. Depending on the final design of the cemetery expansion, new connections to utilities 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.

#### 3.13.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

No acquisition or construction or cemetery operation in the expansion area would occur under the No Action Alternative. Therefore, there would be no impact to the utilities and Community Services.

### 3.14 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.

#### **4.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MINIMIZATION MEASURES**

The CEQ regulations stipulate that the cumulative impacts of a Proposed Action should be considered. The CEQ defines cumulative impacts as “the 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” (40 CFR 1508.7). Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor, but collectively substantial, actions undertaken over a period by various agencies (federal, state, and local) or individuals. This section considers the cumulative impacts resulting from projects that are proposed, under construction, recently completed, or anticipated to be implemented in the reasonably foreseeable future.

For the purposes of this analysis, the project site, adjoining parcels including the existing cemetery, and the properties along Park Lane Road, were identified as the geographic scope for the cumulative effect analysis. The area surrounding the project site is known as the Heritage Farms residential area, which is a mixture of residence on 5 to 20-acre parcels, and agricultural lands. Over the prior decades, there has been increasing pressures on agricultural lands for residential development, and this trend continues. The acquisition and development of the subject parcels coupled with the on-going residential expansion in the area is not expected to have a significant cumulative impact upon the environmental resources of the area.

As indicated in **Table 4**, the Proposed Action would initially result in minor and beneficial cumulative impacts to noise, water resources, transportation systems, and biological resources, due to a decrease in people and activities at the nurseries.

The Proposed Action would result in less than significant impacts with minor and adverse impacts to socioeconomics, air quality, noise, waste, transportation, and safety and health during construction; and to transportation long-term due to an increase in traffic from the increase in visiting members of the public visiting the SFNC.

Long term, implementation of the Proposed Action would result in less than significant impacts to biological resources, but minor beneficial impacts to aesthetics, noise, socioeconomic, and transportation systems. The table below provides a summary of impacts to resources as they

pertain to the Proposed Action. No significant short-term, long-term, or cumulative adverse impacts to any resources are anticipated.

<b>Table 4.1.1 Summary of Impact Analysis</b>				
<b>Resource Area</b>	<b>Initial Short-Term*</b>	<b>Subsequent Development Short Term**</b>	<b>Operation Long-term***</b>	<b>No Action Alternative</b>
Aesthetics	No Impact	Minor Adverse	Minor Beneficial	No Impact
Air Quality	No Impact	Minor Adverse	No Impact	No Impact
Noise	Minor Beneficial	Minor Adverse	Minor Beneficial	No Impact
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	No Impact	No Impact
Water Resources	Minor Beneficial	Minor Adverse	No Impact	No Impact
Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Management	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	No Impact	No Impact
Transportation Systems	Minor Beneficial	Minor Adverse	Minor Beneficial	No Impact
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice	Minor Adverse	Minor Beneficial	Minor Adverse	No Impact
Cultural Resources	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
Biological Resources	Minor Beneficial	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	No Impact
Noise	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	No Impact	No Impact
Land Use	Minor Beneficial	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
Geology and Soils	No Impact	Minor Adverse	Minor Adverse	No Impact
Utilities and Community Service	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
Potential for Generating Substantial Controversy	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact

\* Acquisition

\*\* Construction

\*\*\* Operational

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

This EA has been prepared pursuant to NEPA to evaluate the environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action comprises the funding and acquisition of approximately 25.07 acres of land for the future expansion of the South Florida National Cemetery. The goal of the Proposed Action is to acquire additional lands to extend the operational capacity of the existing national cemetery. Expansion of the cemetery beyond 353 acres (which includes the additional 19.82 acres adjacent to the southwest corner of the cemetery purchased in 2014, also for use in future expansion, bringing the current cemetery area to approximately 353 acres) by the acquisition of the 25.07-acre project site is identified as the Proposed Action. While no federal funds have been secured at this time for the incorporation of the subject site into the South Florida National Cemetery's Master Plan, reasonable assumptions about future use and re-development have been incorporated and are addressed in this EA.

This EA describes the following resource areas and assesses the potential for the Proposed Action to affect these resources areas: aesthetics, air quality; noise; cultural resources; geology and soils; hydrology and water quality; wildlife and habitat; land use; floodplains and wetlands; socioeconomics and environmental justice; solid waste and hazardous materials; transportation and parking; utilities and community service. The Proposed Action would result in some short-term (construction) and long-term (operation) impacts to resources. Based upon the analyses presented herein, no significant impacts to any resource area are anticipated.

Based upon the analyses presented in this environmental assessment, it appears that implementation of the Proposed Action would result in no significant impacts with minor adverse short term and long term impacts on environmental resources.

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**FIGURES**

*Environmental Assessment for  
Site Acquisition for Future Expansion  
of the South Florida National Cemetery  
Lake Worth, Florida*

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**APPENDIX A**

**AGENCY COORDINATION LETTERS**

**APPENDIX B**

CONSISTENCY STATEMENT

## **APPENDIX B**

### **CONSISTENCY STATEMENT**

This consistency statement will examine the potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and ascertain the extent to which the consequences of the Proposed Action are consistent with the objectives of Florida Coastal Management Program (CMP).

Of the Florida Statutory Authorities included in the CMP, impacts in the following areas are addressed in the EA: beach and shore preservation (Chapter 161), historic preservation (Chapter 267), economic development and tourism (Chapter 288), public transportation (Chapters 334 and 339), saltwater living resources (Chapter 370), living land and freshwater resource (Chapter 372), water resources (Chapter 373), environmental control (Chapter 403), and soil and water conservation (Chapter 582). This consistency statement discusses how the proposed options may meet the CMP objectives.

#### **CONSISTENCY DETERMINATION**

##### **Chapter 161: Beach and Shore Preservation**

No disturbances to any principal drainage canals are foreseen under the Proposed Action or any of the alternative actions.

##### **Chapter 267: Historic Preservation**

The cultural resources assessment completed indicated that the Proposed Action would likely have no adverse effect on historic properties.

##### **Chapter 288: Economic Development and Tourism**

The EA presents the new employment impact and net income impact of the Proposed Action. The options would not have significant adverse effects on any key Florida industries or economic diversification efforts.

##### **Chapter 372: Saltwater Living Resources**

The EA addresses potential impacts to local water bodies. Water quality impacts were surveyed for existing conditions at the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. Results indicate that no impacts would result from the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative.

##### **Chapter 372: Living Land and Freshwater Resources**

Threatened and endangered species, major plant communities, conservation of native habitat, and mitigation of potential impacts to the resources are addressed in the EA. The Proposed Action and alternatives would not result in permanent disturbance to native habitat and should not significantly impact threatened or endangered species.

### Chapter 373: Water Resources

There would be no adverse impacts to surface water or groundwater quality under the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative, as discussed in the EA.

### Chapter 403: Environmental Control

The EA addresses the issues of conservation and protection of environmentally sensitive living resources; protection of groundwater and surface water quality and quantity; potable water supply; protection of air quality; minimization of adverse hydrogeologic impacts; protection of endangered or threatened species; solid, sanitary, and hazardous waste disposal; and protection of floodplains and wetlands. Where impacts to these resources can be identified, possible mitigation measures are suggested.

### Chapter 582: Soil and Water Conservation

The EA addresses the potential of the Proposed Action and alternatives to disturb soil and presents possible measures to prevent or minimize soil erosion. Impacts to groundwater and surface water resources also are discussed in the EA.

## CONCLUSION

The US Veterans Affairs finds that the conceptual Proposed Action and alternatives plans presented in the EA are consistent with Florida's CMP.

**APPENDIX C**

PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY REPORT -  
VA CEMETERY SITE, LAKE WORTH, FLORIDA

**APPENDIX D**

ALTA/NSPS LAND TITLE SURVEY

**APPENDIX E**

PHASE II ENVIRONMENTAL SITE ASSESSMENT PROPOSED LAND  
ACQUISITION APPROXIMATELY 25-ACRES OF LAND EAST SIDE OF PARK  
LAND EAST, LAKE WORTH FLORIDA

**APPENDIX F**

**REPRESENTATIVE SITE PHOTOGRAPHS**

