FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ABRAHAM LINCOLN NATIONAL CEMETERY
PHASE 4 GRAVESITE DEVELOPMENT
AND CEMETERY IMPROVEMENTS
ELWOOD, ILLINOIS

Introduction

A Final Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared to identify, analyze, and document the physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Proposed Action to expand and improve the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery (National Cemetery) in Elwood, Illinois.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide fifteen years of additional interment capacity at the National Cemetery to serve the projected burial needs of Veterans in Illinois and the surrounding area. The Proposed Action is needed to meet the National Cemetery Administration's (NCA) goal of providing eligible Veterans and their family members with reasonable access to VA interment options.

The Proposed Action serves to further NCA's mission in honoring Veterans and their eligible family members with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our nation. The Proposed Action, representing Phase 4 of an eight-phase master plan, would provide additional interment capacity for Veterans and their families.

Proposed Action

The VA Office of Construction and Facilities Management is considering implementing a phased expansion of the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery. VA's proposed Phase 4 Gravesite Development and Improvement Project encompasses approximately 197 acres, including previously developed portions of the National Cemetery. The National Cemetery has previously undergone three phases of development and expansion as part of the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery master plan that comprises approximately 225 acres.

The Proposed Action will support the development of additional gravesites and cemetery improvements, including stormwater management ponds and conveyances; a new maintenance facility; paved access roads; ancillary upgrades to Building 2002, Building 3003, the Administrative Building, and the Columbarium Plaza; and intersection improvements along Illinois Route 53 south between West Hoff Road and Walter Strawn Drive. The expansion will provide approximately 47 acres of additional gravesites and columbaria, including 22,800 square feet of funerary niches.

No Action Alternatives Considered

Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. The Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery would remain in its current state. The No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need nor support NCA's goal of providing eligible Veterans and their family members with reasonable access to VA interment options. However, analysis of the No Action Alternative is required by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations. It also provides a benchmark for comparing and analyzing the effects of the other alternatives.

Potential Environmental Effects

Based on the analysis in the Final EA, the Proposed Action would result in less than significant impacts. Table 1 summarizes the findings of the impact analysis by resource area.

Table 1. Summary of Impact Analysis

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Aesthetics	The proposed physical changes to the National Cemetery would not detract from the aesthetics. Aesthetic impacts during construction activities would be temporary and less than significant. Physical changes to the National Cemetery would be consistent with existing architecture as well as landscaping. Aesthetic impacts would be less than significant.	None
Air Quality	Construction activities would have short-term minor impacts related to emissions and fugitive dust. Combined construction and operation emissions would be substantially below the General Conformity maintenance area de minimis threshold. Air quality impacts would be less than significant.	None
Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change	Construction equipment and vehicles would emit greenhouse gases while operating. VA would use lower emitting equipment/vehicles and local contractors and minimize vehicle/equipment idling to the extent feasible.	None

	Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change effects are anticipated to be less than significant.	
Cultural and Historic Resources	The Illinois State Historic Preservation Office concurred with VA's determination that the Proposed Action will not adversely affect any historic resources. Construction will primarily occur on previously disturbed ground, and the National Cemetery is a low risk for inadvertent discovery of pre-contact cultural resources and a low risk for uncovering historic-period cultural resources. While the National Cemetery is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, the Proposed Action meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and will not adversely affect any historic resources.	None
Geology, Topography, and Soils	Ground disturbing activities would have minimal changes to topography. Ground disturbances would be stabilized during operation and all permit requirements would be met. Impacts to geology and soils would be less than significant.	None
Hydrology and Water Quality	On-site stormwater engineering controls to retain and manage stormwater flow would be implemented, and permit requirements would be met, resulting in less than significant impacts to hydrology and downgradient water quality.	None
Wildlife and Habitat	The National Cemetery does not contain any critical habitat for State or Federally-listed species. United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) time-of-year restrictions for clearing of vegetation, including trees, would be implemented. Identification and awareness training regarding the potential presence of eastern massasauga rattlesnake would be provided to construction personnel prior to ground disturbance. No effects to designated habitat or listed species are anticipated, resulting in less than significant impacts to wildlife and habitat.	None

Noise	Construction activities would result in minor short-term noise impacts. Long-term operational noise within the area of the Proposed Action would be consistent with the existing cemetery operations associated with maintenance activities and ceremonial rifle salutes. There are no significant long-term operational noise impacts.	None
Land Use	The National Cemetery would remain compatible with surrounding land uses, resulting in less than significant impacts.	None
Wetlands and Other Water Resources	No impacts to floodplains or potentially jurisdictional wetlands or waterways are anticipated. Further, no impacts within the Village of Elwood's minimum setback distance of 25-feet are proposed under the Phase 4 cemetery expansion.	None
Socioeconomics	There would be short-term beneficial impacts to local employment and personal income during construction activities.	None
Community Services	Construction activities at the National Cemetery are not expected to place additional substantial demands on police, fire, emergency services, and other community services.	None
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	During construction, the presence and use of petroleum and hazardous substances could increase the potential for accidental release or spill; however, minimization measures would make this potential impact less than significant. There would not be a long-term and significant increase in the amount of hazardous waste generated by the National Cemetery.	None
Traffic, Transportation, and Parking	Project activities are not anticipated to significantly impact existing or future traffic patterns surrounding the National Cemetery. Impacts to traffic during construction would be temporary and localized.	None

Utilities	There would be a negligible increase in the consumption of utilities, including electricity, natural gas, potable water, and stormwater/sanitary sewer discharges. Impacts would be less than significant.	None
Environmental Justice	There would be no disproportionate impacts to disadvantaged populations.	None

The project-specific protection and compliance measures listed in Attachment A would be incorporated into the Proposed Action, to the extent practicable, and ensure the impacts addressed would be less than significant.

Agency and Public Comment

VA published a notice of scoping on September 29 and 30, 2023 in The Herald-News and a statewide public notice website. The notice described the Proposed Action and solicited public comments with a deadline of 30 days after the publishing date, or October 30, 2023. VA mailed letters to federal, state, and local agencies; public officials; Federally-recognized Tribes; and any identified special interest groups. Similar to the notices published in the newspaper, the letters included information on the Proposed Action, comment period, and instruction on submitting comments. Scoping responses regarding the Proposed Action have included a request for continued consultation and a statement of no objection from the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, as well as guidance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Chicago Regulatory District regarding aquatic resource investigations and permitting processes.

VA also initiated Section 106 consultation with Illinois State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in September 2023. Illinois SHPO provided concurrence on October 12, 2023, with VA's finding that no historic archaeological properties are known to exist within the area of potential effects; however, the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery is a historic district eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Illinois SHPO stated that because the undertaking proposes to appropriately repair contributing resources to the historic district, the project meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and will not adversely affect any historic resources.

VA published the Draft EA for a 30-day public comment period, as announced by the Notice of Availability that was published in The Herald-News on October 17 and 18, 2023. Review copies of the Draft EA were made available online and at the Joliet Public Library. VA has responded to all public comments in the Final EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analyses in the Final EA, which is summarized and incorporated by reference herein, VA concludes that implementing the Proposed Action would not have a significant adverse impact on the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

Signing On behalf of MWD Executive Director

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Joshua M. De Leon
Executive Director, NCA – Midwest District
Department of Veterans Affairs

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Fernando L. Fernandez
Environmental Program Office
Office of Construction & Facilities Management

Attachment A. Protection and Compliance Measures Incorporated into the Proposed Action

Resource Area	Description	Type
Aesthetics	Design new structures to be architecturally and visually consistent with the current buildings located at the National Cemetery.	BMP
	Maintain landscaped areas, buildings, roadways, and signage.	BMP
	Incorporate existing topography and natural features into site design, wherever possible.	BMP
	Conduct construction activities with a sensitivity toward maintaining the dignity and solemnity of the National Cemetery environment during interment services.	BMP
Air Quality	Use appropriate fugitive dust suppression measures.	BMP
	Use newer construction equipment with emissions controls and maintain equipment.	BMP
	Reduce idling of construction equipment and vehicles to minimize exhaust emissions.	BMP
	Perform all demolition work under licensed contractors.	Regulatory requirement
	Use standard measures to control dust to reduce Lead Bearing Substances dust emissions during renovation.	BMP
	Implement site-specific SWPPP and erosion and sediment control plan to minimize and avoid fugitive dust as applicable.	Regulatory requirement
Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change	Use low-GHG-emitting technologies.	BMP
	Procure construction materials with lower amounts of embodied carbon.	BMP
	Utilize local contractors and shared transportation where feasible to minimize mileage traveled by workers to and from the site.	BMP
Cultural and Historic Resources	In the event human remains or other cultural items, as defined by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, are found during construction or operation of the National Cemetery, work would	Regulatory requirement

	be halted in the area and the appropriate authorities and Tribes would be immediately contacted.	
	If the project's scope of work changes from that which has been submitted to and approved by the Illinois SHPO, changes must be emailed to SHPO.Review@Illinois.gov and to Anthony Rubano (Anthony.Rubano@Illinois.gov) for review and comment. Further, respective Tribes would be notified for consultation.	Regulatory requirement
Geology and Soils	Implement an erosion and sediment control plan to address soil disturbance during construction that includes the implementation of erosion and sediment control devices and stabilization practices.	Regulatory requirement
Hydrology and Water Quality	Use environmentally sensitive site design, stormwater pollution prevention controls, good engineering practices, and construction BMPs.	BMP
	Implement appropriate groundwater engineering controls and dewatering practices should groundwater be encountered during construction.	BMP
	Locate machinery servicing and refueling areas away from waterways to reduce the possibility and minimize the impacts of any accidental spills or discharges.	BMP
Wildlife and Habitat	Operate all vehicles traveling within and around the project area in accordance with posted speed limits. Vehicles should avoid snakes in the road.	BMP
	Restrict all vegetation removal and disturbance (e.g., burning, mowing) to months when the eastern massasauga rattlesnake species is likely to be hibernating (i.e., October to mid-March).	BMP
	Perform limited vegetation and tree clearing only during the USFWS-designated winter clearing window for the northern long-eared bat (October 1 through March 31). Limiting vegetation removal to occur only between October 1 through March 31 will avoid impacts to migratory birds.	BMP

	Provide identification and awareness training regarding the potential presence of eastern massasauga rattlesnake to construction personnel.	BMP
	Immediately stop construction if an eastern massasauga rattlesnake is observed. Cease activities until proper agency coordination is conducted.	BMP
	Limit vegetation removal within the area to the extent possible.	BMP
Noise	Limit construction-related noise near sensitive receptors and coordinate proposed construction activities in advance with any nearby sensitive receptors.	BMP
	Shut down noise-generating equipment when it is not needed and maintain equipment per manufacturer's recommendations to minimize noise generation.	BMP
	Utilize broadband, self-adjusting backup alarms in lieu of backup-beepers consistent with applicable safety requirements and encourage construction personnel to operate equipment in the quietest manner practicable.	BMP
	Locate stational operating equipment as far away from sensitive receptors as possible.	BMP
	Select material transportation routes as far away from sensitive receptors as possible.	BMP
	Maintain equipment per manufacturer's recommendations to minimize noise generation.	BMP
Land Use	As a Federal agency operating within Federal lands, VA is not subject to local zoning regulations. None required.	N/A
Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Zone Management	Implement a SWPPP as part of the IEPA General Storm Water Permit for Construction Site Activities permit to address stormwater runoff into adjacent water resources during construction.	Regulatory requirement
	Clearly demarcate designated work areas.	BMP

	Avoid floodplains and Waters of the United States.	BMP
	Maintain a minimum 25-foot buffer of undisturbed land around the adjacent wetland.	BMP
	Inspect and maintain construction vehicles in good working order and maintain a spill kit.	BMP
Socioeconomics	Secure the construction area to prevent unauthorized access to the property and to reduce the potential of health and safety risks.	Protection Measure
Community Services	Coordinate any short-term road closures with the local emergency and transportation services to prevent significant disruption to their services.	BMP
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	Store and appropriately label petroleum products and hazardous materials in approved containers.	BMP
	Store containers on a level and impervious surface.	BMP
	Use secondary containment systems around fuel storage containers during refueling activities. Should a spill or release occur, any impacted soil would be properly handled per Federal and State laws and regulations.	Regulatory requirement
Traffic, Transportation, and Parking	Coordinate with the Village of Elwood on any short-term road closures during construction.	BMP
	Sequence construction to the extent feasible to minimize impacts to traffic or transportation patterns.	BMP
Utilities	None required.	N/A
Environmental Justice	None required.	N/A

The following federal, state, and/or local environmental permits and approvals were identified as potentially being required as part of the Proposed Action. This list may not be exhaustive, and the selected developer will be responsible for any additional compliance and permits.

- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit (CGP)

- The CGP is required for land disturbances[1] of 1 acre or more (including borrow and materials storage areas) that have the potential to discharge stormwater to waters of the U.S. or a storm sewer.
- This permit is issued by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and would require the development and implementation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP).
- Additional information about this permit is available at: https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/forms/water-permits/storm-water/Pages/construction.aspx

- Erosion Control Permit
  - This permit is required by the Elwood, Illinois Code of Ordinances, Chapter 157: Soil Erosion and Sediment Control, and applies to any land disturbing activity that will affect an area in excess of 5,000 square feet; any land disturbing activity that will affect an area in excess of 500 square feet if the activity is within 25 feet of a lake, pond, stream, or wetland; or excavation, fill, or any combination thereof that will exceed 100 cubic yards.
  - Additional information about this permit is available at: https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/elwood/latest/elwood_il/0-0-0-21137

- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Bureau of Air Title V Permit
  - The National Cemetery is under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Bureau of Air. The Air Quality Control Region containing the cemetery is Will County. The county is currently in non-attainment for ozone and in full attainment for all other criteria pollutants.
  - VA does not have, and is not required to have, a Title V operating permit based on current and proposed conditions.
  - In accordance with EO 13045 on children's health, EPA recommends operators and workers using diesel-powered equipment pay particular attention to worksite proximity to where children may learn, play, or live and to impose diesel emission reduction measures near these locations. Possible sensitive air quality receptors adjacent to the National Cemetery include the Village of Elwood.

[1] Land Disturbance means exposed soil due to clearing of vegetation, grading, or excavation activities.