FINAL
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

FOR THE PROPOSED

ALBUQUERQUE NATIONAL CEMETERY

BERNALILLO COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF CONSTRUCTION AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT
425 I STREET, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20001

February 6, 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) proposed acquisition of approximately 230 acres of land near Albuquerque, New Mexico for the construction and operation of a new National Cemetery. This EA includes the initial phase of cemetery development (approximately 40 to 60 acres). Supplemental NEPA analyses will be conducted for subsequent phases of cemetery development. This EA has been prepared as required in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 ([NEPA]; 42 United States Code 4321 *et seq.*), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and *Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions* (38 CFR Part 26), and the *VA NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects* (2010).

Proposed Action

VA proposes to acquire approximately 230 acres of land located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in an unincorporated area of Bernalillo County, New Mexico (Site) for the development and operation of a new National Cemetery. The new cemetery would provide burial facilities for Veterans and eligible family members in central New Mexico.

VA plans to acquire the land in 2023 and would begin the cemetery master planning and design approximately 6 months after acquisition. The master planning and design process is anticipated to require 2 years. VA would follow the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) *Facilities Design Guide* in the proposed National Cemetery design. The cemetery would include a gated entrance and perimeter fencing, an administration and public information building, an assembly area, flagpoles, a chapel, a memorial wall, committal shelters, a loop road through the cemetery, casket gravesites with markers, columbarium niches, and a maintenance building/facility. The cemetery would be developed in phases, with the first phase (approximately 40 to 60 acres) including the buildings and infrastructure needed to support the first 15 years of burial capacity. It is anticipated the first phase of cemetery development would be completed within 2 years of the completion of the cemetery design.

The proposed National Cemetery would be open to the public every day throughout the year. VA anticipates approximately 14 funeral processions per weekday at the cemetery, averaging approximately 10 cars per procession. VA estimates that the cemetery, once fully established, would receive approximately 170 vehicles per weekday (funeral processions, visitors, and staff).

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to establish a new National Cemetery of sufficient size and capacity to serve the projected burial needs of Veterans in the central New Mexico area.

The proposed new National Cemetery is needed to address the depletion of National Cemetery burial space in central New Mexico. The existing Santa Fe National Cemetery (SFNC), located at 501 North Guadalupe Street in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is the only National Cemetery in central New Mexico and is nearing its burial capacity. The new cemetery would provide additional burial capacity, as well as improved cemetery access (reduced travel time), for central New Mexico Veterans and their families.

One of the primary objectives of the VA burial program is to ensure that burial needs of Veterans and eligible family members are met. NCA further defines this objective on the assumption that the burial needs of a Veteran are met if they have reasonable access to a burial option (whether for caskets, remains, or cremated remains, either in-ground or in a columbarium) in a National or State Veterans Cemetery within 75 miles of the Veteran's place of residence. The Proposed Action would provide VA additional capacity needed to meet its burial objectives for eligible Veterans in the central New Mexico area.

Alternatives

This EA examines in-depth two alternatives, the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative, defined as follows:

- **Proposed Action:** VA proposes to acquire approximately 230 acres of land, located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in an unincorporated area of Bernalillo County, New Mexico and to develop it with a new National Cemetery. The Site is located in a rural but developing area in the north-central portion of Bernalillo County and south of the Double Eagle II Airport. The Site is currently undeveloped, generally level, pastureland. The majority of the Site would be developed with the proposed cemetery.
- **No Action Alternative:** Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. NCA would continue to provide burial services at SFNC until the existing capacity is reached, after which the cemetery would be maintained and open for visitors but would be closed for new interments. Veterans and their families residing in central New Mexico would no longer be served by a proximate National Cemetery and would be required to travel a substantial distance for burial at a National Cemetery. The Site would likely remain undeveloped pastureland in the short term but could be developed for another use in the future.

The Proposed Action provides land necessary to meet the regional cemetery requirements of VA. The No Action Alternative would not enable VA to provide adequate cemetery facilities in central New Mexico, and thus, would not meet the purpose of or need for the Proposed Action. However, the No Action Alternative is assessed in this EA to provide a benchmark for comparing potential impacts of the Proposed Action, as required under the CEQ Regulations.

Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

The affected environment of the Site and its immediate surroundings, or the region of influence of the Proposed Action, is discussed in Section 3 of this EA.

The two considered alternatives, the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative, are evaluated in this EA to determine their potential direct or indirect impact(s) on the physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects of the Proposed Action's region of influence.

Technical areas evaluated in this EA include:

- *Aesthetics*
- *Air Quality*
- *Cultural Resources and Historic Properties*
- *Geology, Topography, and Soils*
- *Hydrology and Water Quality*
- *Wildlife and Habitat*
- *Noise*
- *Land Use*
- *Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Zone Management*
- *Socioeconomics*
- *Community Services*
- *Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials*
- *Transportation and Parking*
- *Utilities*
- *Environmental Justice*
- *Cumulative Impacts*
- *Potential for Generating Substantial Controversy*

Potential Effects of the Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would result in the impacts identified throughout Section 3 and summarized in the table below. These include potential short-term and/or long-term adverse impacts to aesthetics, air quality, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, wildlife and habitat, noise, land use, solid waste and hazardous materials, transportation, and utilities. All of these potential impacts are less than significant and would be further reduced through careful implementation of the general best management practices

(BMPs); management, minimization, and avoidance measures; and compliance with regulatory requirements, as identified in Section 4.

The Proposed Action would enable VA to provide proximate National Cemetery burial benefits to the regional Veteran community, a significant beneficial socioeconomic effect.

Potential Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. No beneficial impacts attributable to the Proposed Action would occur. Veterans and their families residing in central New Mexico would continue to use the SFNC until space is no longer available. Once SFNC reaches capacity, Veterans and their families in the region would be required to travel much longer distances to the nearest National Cemetery for burial and subsequent visits, at increased cost and time.

Table ES-1 summarizes the environmental impact analysis for the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative.

Table ES-1
Summary of Impact Analysis

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action
Aesthetics	**Minor short-term direct adverse impact**. Minor short-term direct adverse visual impacts during cemetery construction (heavy machinery, land disturbance, and dust). Negligible long-term aesthetic impacts as a result of the cemetery development. Cemetery would be designed in harmony with the natural topography and features and would have low visual impact, generally consistent with surrounding land uses.	No impact.
Air Quality	**Minor short-term and long-term, direct adverse and beneficial impacts.** Minor short-term direct adverse impact due to construction dust and equipment emissions reduced through BMPs. Very minor local long-term direct adverse impacts due to vehicle emissions from visitors to the cemetery. Regional long-term reduction in vehicle emissions from visitors traveling to more distant cemeteries (beneficial impact).	Indirect long-term impacts associated with vehicular air emissions as Veterans travel greater distances to other National Cemeteries.
Cultural Resources and Historic Properties	No impact. No adverse effect to historic properties. New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office concurred with VA's no adverse effect to historic properties finding.	No impact.

Table ES-1

Summary of Impact Analysis

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action
Geology and Soils	**Minor short-term direct adverse impact**. Minor short-term direct adverse soil erosion and sediment impacts during cemetery construction minimized through BMPs.	No impact.
Hydrology and Water Quality	**Minor short-term direct adverse impact**. Minor short-term direct adverse stormwater runoff impacts during cemetery construction minimized through BMPs. Cemetery would be designed in concert with the current drainage patterns and would include on-site stormwater retention with no/negligible long-term water quality impact.	No impact.
Wildlife and Habitat	**Minor short-term direct adverse impact**. Minor short-term direct adverse impact during construction. Site provides potential nesting habitat, including prairie dog burrows, for burrowing owls (protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act). Ground-disturbing construction would be conducted outside the burrowing owl nesting season. If ground disturbing activity cannot be conducted outside the owl nesting season, a qualified biologist would survey the site for active nests prior to construction. VA would consult with NMDGF and/or USFWS for recommendations for owl relocation or avoidance if nesting owls are identified. VA would consult with NMDGF prior to construction to develop a plan to relocate or humanely remove prairie dogs that would be impacted by ground disturbing cemetery construction activities.	No impact.
Noise	**Minor short-term and long-term, direct and indirect adverse impact.** Minor short-term direct adverse heavy equipment noise impacts and indirect adverse material transportation impacts during cemetery development controlled through construction BMPs. Negligible to minor long-term operational direct adverse noise impacts associated with occasional heavy equipment use and ceremonial rifle fire (approximately 14 times per day) during weekday business hours.	No impact.

Table ES-1

Summary of Impact Analysis

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action
Land Use	**Minor long-term direct adverse impact**. Minor long-term direct adverse impact as a result of the Site's conversion from grassy pastureland undeveloped land into a cemetery. Cemetery would be generally compatible with surrounding land uses (pastureland and airport). Low profile of proposed cemetery building would not pose a hazard for flight operations at the adjacent airport.	No impact.
Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Zone Management	**No impact.** No wetlands, floodplains, or coastal zones are located on the Site or surrounding properties.	No impact.
Socioeconomics	**Minor short-term, indirect beneficial impacts and significant long-term direct beneficial impacts.** Minor short-term indirect beneficial impacts to local economy as a result of temporary construction jobs. Significant long-term direct beneficial impact as Proposed Action would provide a regionally proximate National Cemetery of sufficient size for central New Mexico area Veterans and their families.	Inadequate VA cemetery options – adverse direct, long-term impact to local Veterans.
Community Services	**No/negligible impact.** Proposed cemetery would put minimal additional load on the local police department and other community services.	No impact.
Solid and Hazardous Materials	**Minor short-term and long-term, direct adverse impact.** Potential minor short-term and long-term direct adverse impacts from petroleum/hazardous substance storage and handling during cemetery construction and operation reduced through standard BMPs. The Site is located adjacent to a large area used for bombing practice during WWII. Nearest inert practice bombing targets were located approximately one mile from the Site; live bombing target was approximately 2.9 miles north of the Site. No munitions-related debris was identified during a survey of the Site in 2017. An Educational Institutional Control would be developed and implemented to inform, educate, and protect personnel performing intrusive work at the Site from injury in the unlikely event of discovering a munitions and explosives of concern item.	No impact.

Table ES-1

Summary of Impact Analysis

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action
Transportation and Parking	**Minor short-term and long-term, direct adverse transportation impacts.** Minor short-term direct adverse impacts associated with cemetery construction traffic on local roads. Minor long-term direct adverse traffic impacts during cemetery operation. VA estimates the cemetery, once fully established would generate 340 one-way vehicle trips/weekday. The Traffic Impact Analysis found that the cemetery would generate a small number of peak hour trips (approximately 50 during AM peak and 50 during PM peak) and would add very little peak hour traffic to area intersections. No parking impact; proposed cemetery would include adequate on-site parking.	No impact.

Table ES-1

Summary of Impact Analysis

Resource Area	Proposed Action	No Action
Utilities	**Minor short-term impact and minor long-term, direct adverse impact.** Minor short-term local utility impacts from installation of new utilities, as needed. An approved development agreement for water and sewer service is in place for the Site as part of the Upper Petroglyphs Sector Development Plan (UPSDP); however, the development plans include the installation of approximately three miles of 24-inch diameter water transmission lines and three miles of 12-inch diameter sewage collector lines along Atrisco Vista Boulevard that have not yet been installed. VA would coordinate with the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA) and UPSDP master developer during the cemetery design to determine the time frame of these utility installations and accessibility to the Site. If it is determined that VA would be required to install or fund the installation of new water transmission lines to service the cemetery, additional NEPA and NHPA analysis would be conducted prior to construction, as required. Electrical services, natural gas, and telecommunications services are available near the Site. Minor long-term direct adverse utility impact associated with the use of municipal water or reuse water for cemetery irrigation. VA would coordinate with the ABCWUA during the cemetery design to determine if the municipal water system has sufficient capacity to provide irrigation water for the cemetery without a substantial reduction in available water for other users. If the municipal water system does not have the capacity, VA would seek approval from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer to install an on-site irrigation water well. Drought tolerant species suited to central New Mexico would be planted in non-burial areas, to the extent possible, to minimize irrigation needs.	No impact.
Environmental Justice	**Minor long-term beneficial impact.** No adverse local environmental justice impacts; the Site is not located in an area with a larger than average low-income or high minority population. Regional low-income and minority Veterans and their families would benefit from the closer cemetery, a minor long-term beneficial impact.	No impact.

Cumulative Impacts

This EA also examines the potential cumulative effects of implementing each of the considered alternatives. This analysis finds that the Proposed Action, with the implementation of the BMPs; management, minimization, and avoidance measures; and regulatory compliance measures specified in this EA, would not result in significant adverse cumulative impacts to onsite or regional, natural or cultural resources, and would maintain or enhance the socioeconomic environment of the area through the long-term provision of required National Cemetery facilities for regional Veterans and their families. The No Action Alternative would not produce these potential beneficial socioeconomic gains.

Agency and Public Involvement

Agencies consulted for this EA include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. National Park Service (Petroglyph National Monument)
- U.S. Federal Aviation Administration
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service
- New Mexico Environment Department (various bureaus)
- New Mexico Department of Transportation
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
- New Mexico Office of the State Engineer
- Bernalillo County (various departments)
- City of Albuquerque (various departments)
- Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority
- Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority
- Double Eagle II Airport

Responses were received from U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, U.S. National Park Service (NPS) - Petroglyph National Monument, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Department of Transportation, Bernalillo County – Natural Resource Services, and the City of Albuquerque Aviation Department. Input provided by these agencies is summarized in Section 6. Agency information and comments have been incorporated into this EA, as and where appropriate. Copies of relevant correspondence can be found in Appendix B.

In November 2022, VA initiated National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 consultation with the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office (NM SHPO), City of Albuquerque's Open Space Division, NPS-Petroglyph National Monument, Albuquerque Historical Society, Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico, Historic ABQ (Historic Albuquerque, Inc.), Historical Society of New Mexico, National Hispanic Cultural Center, and 28 federally-recognized Indian tribes with geographic or cultural affiliation with the Site area. The Section 106 consultation letters included a description of VA's proposed undertaking (Proposed Action), definition of the area of potential effects (APE), identification of historic properties (i.e., the results of the 2022 Initial Cultural Resource Impact Prediction and 2018 Cultural Resources Survey), and VA's finding of effects on historic properties (i.e., no historic properties affected). VA invited the agencies and Indian tribes to provide input regarding the Proposed Action.

In a letter dated December 6, 2022, the NM SHPO concurred that there are no historic properties within the Site area. NM SHPO stated that Petroglyph National Monument is located within the visual effects APE; however, in their view, the undertaking would have no adverse effect on historic properties because the proposed cemetery will comprise a low-lying, landscape area with few buildings. VA responded to the NM

SHPO in a letter dated January 17, 2023 that was signed and sent January 19, 2023. VA agreed to expand the visual APE to include Petroglyph National Monument and accordingly changed the finding of effect from "no historic properties affected" to "no adverse effect" to historic properties.

In a letter dated December 14, 2022, NPS-Petroglyph National Monument also recommended extending the visual effects APE to include Petroglyph National Monument, recommended cemetery design that would reduce or eliminate visual impacts to the Monument, and suggested a "water-wise" design that incorporated low water and native vegetation. NPS also requested to be involved in the cemetery design. In a letter to NPS dated January 17, 2023 that was signed and sent January 19, 2023, VA agreed to extend the visual effects APE to include the Monument and shared (and stated their concurrence with) the NM SHPO response that indicated the undertaking would have no adverse effect on historic properties because the design of the cemetery is anticipated to be a low-lying (no elements over two stories), landscaped area with few buildings. VA acknowledged NPS' request for a "water-wise" design and indicated that it would be considered. VA also stated that they plan to share cemetery design information with NPS and other interested consulting parties at the approximately 30%, 60% and 90% design stages for review and comment. VA will continue to correspond with NPS.

On December 7, 2022, the Pueblo of Tesuque expressed an interest in consulting on the undertaking but offered no comments. Historic Albuquerque, Inc. offered design assistance in the future, if needed, but did not request to participate in the Section 106 consultation. No other agencies or Indian tribes have responded or elected to participate in the Section 106 consultation process. Section 106 agency and Tribal information and comments have been incorporated in this EA (Section 3.5) and are summarized in Section 6. Section 106 correspondence is provided in Appendix C.

VA published and distributed the Draft EA for a 30-day public comment period, as announced by a Notice of Availability (NOA) published in the Albuquerque Journal on December 28, 2022 and January 8, 2023. A copy of the Draft EA was made available for public review at the Central and Unser Library located at 8081 Central Avenue in Albuquerque and on the VA Office of Construction and Facilities Management Environmental Program website: (https://www.cfm.va.gov/environmental/index.asp). VA also emailed notification of the Draft EA for review and comment, with a link to the Draft EA on VA's website, to each of the government agencies and Indian tribes that were contacted during the NEPA scoping and Section 106 consultation. ABCWUA provided comments on the Draft EA. These comments were considered in preparing the Final EA, as appropriate, and are summarized in Section 5.2. VA did not receive any additional government agency, Indian tribe, or public comments regarding the Draft EA.

Conclusions

This EA concludes there would be no significant adverse impact, either individually or cumulatively, to the human environment associated with the Proposed Action, provided the management, minimization, avoidance and regulatory compliance measures described in this EA are implemented.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AADT	annual average daily traffic
ACHP	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
ABCAQP	Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Program
ABCWUA	Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority
amsl	above mean sea level
APE	Area of Potential Effects
BCCO	Bernalillo County Code of Ordinances
BCNRS	Bernalillo County Natural Resource Services
CAA	Clean Air Act
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CRS	Cultural Resources Survey
CWA	Clean Water Act
CZMP	Coastal Zone Management Program
CZMA	Coastal Zone Management Act
dBA	decibels, A-weighted scale
E&S	Erosion and Sedimentation
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FBO	Federal Business Opportunity
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Map
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FPPA	Farmland Protection Policy Act
HAP	Hazardous Air Pollutants
ICRIP	Initial Cultural Resource Impact Prediction
IICEP	Interagency and Intergovernmental Coordination for Environmental Planning
LOS	Level of Service
MRCOG	Mid-Region Council of Governments
MS4	Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NAGPRA	Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
NCA	National Cemetery Administration
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NMDGF	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
NMDOT	New Mexico Department of Transportation
NMED	New Mexico Environment Department
NMEMNRD	New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
NMOSE	New Mexico Office of the State Engineer
NM SHPO	New Mexico Historic Preservation Division/State Historic Preservation Office
NOA	Notice of Availability
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NPDES	National Pollution Discharge Elimination System
NPS	National Park Service
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NWI	National Wetland Inventory
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Phase I ESA	Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
ROW 10	Row 10 Historic Preservation Solutions
SFNC	Santa Fe National Cemetery
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SIP	State Implementation Plan
SWPPP	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan
tpy	tons per year
TTL	TTL Associates, Inc.
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USEPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
WOTUS	Waters of the US

1.0 INTRODUCTION, INCLUDING PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE ACTION

1.1 Introduction

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared as required in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 ([NEPA]; 42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), *Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions* (38 CFR Part 26), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) *NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2010). Federal agencies are required to consider the environmental effects of their proposed actions. This EA is required to determine if VA's Proposed Action would have significant environmental impacts.

This EA has been prepared to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with VA's proposed acquisition of approximately 230 acres of land in the Albuquerque, New Mexico area for the construction and operation of a new National Cemetery. This EA includes the initial phase of cemetery development (approximately 40 to 60 acres). Supplemental NEPA analyses will be conducted for subsequent phases of cemetery development.

In accordance with the cited regulations, this EA allows for public input into the federal decision-making process; provides federal decision-makers with an understanding of potential environmental effects of their decisions, before making these decisions; identifies measures the federal decision-maker could implement to reduce potential environmental effects; and documents the NEPA process.

1.2 Background

One of the primary objectives of the VA burial program is to ensure that the burial needs of Veterans and eligible family members are met. The VA National Cemetery Administration (NCA) further defines this objective on the assumption that the burial needs of Veterans are met if they have reasonable access to burial options (whether for caskets, remains or cremated remains, either in-ground or in a columbarium) in a National or VA-funded State Veterans Cemetery within 75 miles of the Veteran's place of residence.

Two existing National Cemeteries serve New Mexico, Santa Fe National Cemetery (60 miles northeast of Albuquerque) and Fort Bayard National Cemetery (230 miles southwest of Albuquerque), and three VA-funded State Veterans Cemeteries serve New Mexico, Fort Stanton State Veterans Cemetery (180 miles southeast of Albuquerque), Gallup State Veterans Cemetery (140 miles west of Albuquerque), and Angel Fire State Veterans Cemetery (150 miles northeast of Albuquerque). Only Santa Fe National Cemetery (SFNC) is located within 75 miles of Albuquerque, the primary population center of New Mexico. The locations of the existing National Cemeteries in New Mexico are shown on Figure 1-1.

The SFNC, located at 501 North Guadalupe Street in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is nearing its burial capacity. VA concluded that a new National Cemetery near Albuquerque best suited the burial needs of central New Mexico Veterans and their families, the majority of whom live in the Albuquerque area.

VA proposes to acquire approximately 230 acres of land located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in an unincorporated area of Bernalillo County, New Mexico (Site) for the construction and operation of the proposed National Cemetery. The Site is located approximately 10 miles west of downtown Albuquerque and approximately 60 miles southwest of Santa Fe. The Site location is depicted on Figures 1-1 and 1-2.

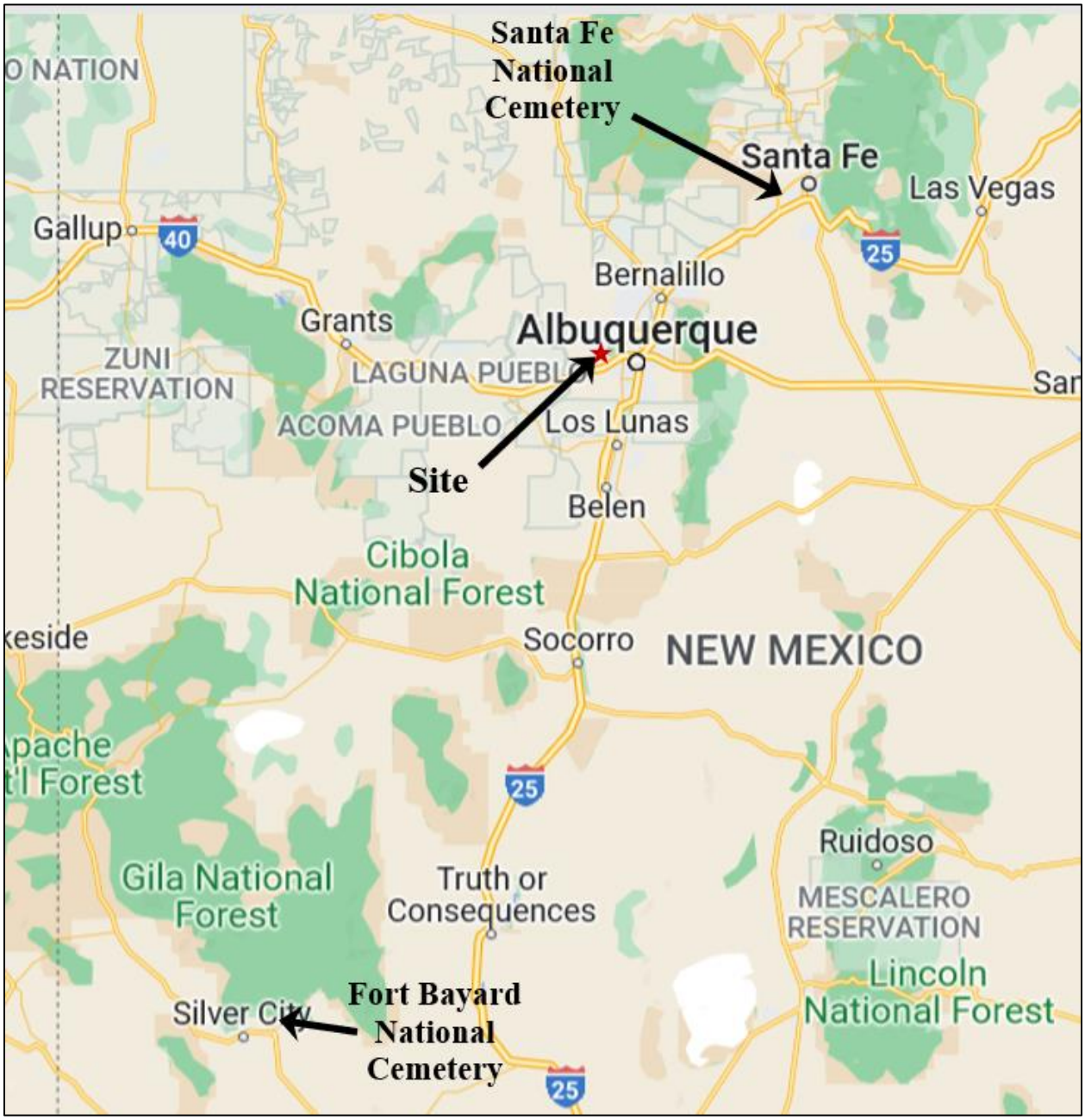

Figure 1-1 Locations of Existing National Cemeteries in New Mexico

Figure 1-2 Site Location Map

1.3 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to establish a new National Cemetery of sufficient size and capacity to serve the burial needs of Veterans in central New Mexico.

The Proposed Action is needed to address the depletion of National Cemetery burial space in central New Mexico. The existing SFNC is the only National Cemetery in the region and is nearing its burial capacity.

1.4 Decision-Making

This EA has been prepared to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with VA's proposed acquisition of approximately 230 acres of land located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in Bernalillo County, New Mexico for the development and operation of a new National Cemetery. This EA

includes the initial phase of cemetery development (approximately 40 to 60 acres). Supplemental NEPA analyses will be conducted for subsequent phases of cemetery development.

VA, as a federal agency, is required to incorporate environmental considerations into their decision-making process for the actions they propose to undertake. This is done in accordance with the regulations identified in Section 1.1.

Ultimately, VA will decide, in part based on the analysis presented in this EA and after having taken potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic effects into account, whether VA should implement the Proposed Action, and, as appropriate, carry out management, minimization, and mitigation measures (if necessary) to reduce effects on the environment.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Introduction

This Section provides information regarding the Proposed Action and its alternatives, including those that VA initially considered, but eliminated, and the reasons for eliminating them. The screening criteria and the process developed and applied by VA to refine the number of reasonable alternatives is described to provide an understanding of VA's rationale for analyzing the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative in this EA.

2.2 Proposed Action

VA proposes to acquire approximately 230 acres of land located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in an unincorporated area of Bernalillo County, New Mexico (Site) for the construction and operation of a new National Cemetery. The new cemetery would provide burial facilities for Veterans and eligible family members in central New Mexico.

The proposed National Cemetery would be open to the public every day throughout the year. VA anticipates approximately 14 funeral processions per weekday at the cemetery, averaging approximately 10 cars per procession. VA estimates that the cemetery, once fully established, would receive approximately 170 vehicles per weekday (funeral processions, visitors and staff).

VA plans to acquire the Site in 2023 and would begin the cemetery master planning and design approximately 6 months after acquisition. The master planning and design process is anticipated to require 2 years. VA would follow the NCA *Facilities Design Guide* in the proposed cemetery design. The cemetery would be developed in phases, with the first phase (approximately 40 to 60 acres) including the buildings and infrastructure needed to support the first approximately 15 years of burial capacity. It is anticipated the first phase of cemetery development would be begin approximately 3 years after site acquisition and would be completed in 2 years.

It is anticipated that the proposed cemetery would generally include the following components:

- A gated entrance designed to provide a sense of a National Shrine or ceremonial place. The entrance road would be a divided boulevard with masonry or stone walls at the entrance, indicating the name of the cemetery.
- An Administration and Public Information Building in the vicinity of the cemetery entrance. This building would be architecturally consistent with the cemetery design and would serve as office space for approximately six staff members. The structure would include appropriate storage, administration space, a public information lobby, and public restroom facilities, as well as adjacent parking for staff and visitors. All facilities would be compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Near the Administration and Public Information Building would be three separate parallel lanes that split off from the main entrance road and would be used for staging funeral cortege processions. These lanes would be designed to hold at least 30 vehicles each. Additionally, an approximate 28-foot-wide road would wind throughout the cemetery in harmony with the natural grade and environmental features of the land. This road would loop back around the property to maintain a complete, simple traffic pattern around the cemetery. All onsite roads would have a speed limit of 15 miles per hour (mph).

- Two to four permanent committal shelters would be constructed for ceremonies. These shelters would be designed and located where there are scenic views, maximum weather protection, and minimal potential for noise disruption.
- An assembly area would be centrally located and would include a flagpole bearing the US flag. Non-burial ceremonies would occur at the assembly area. The ideal location would represent a natural amphitheater setting.
- A Memorial Wall area with markers designating those Veterans whose remains are unavailable for burial (i.e., missing in action, buried at sea, etc.).
- A Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) flagpole would be located along with a Memorial Walkway feature in an aesthetically pleasing area of the site to accommodate donated monuments from veterans' organizations.
- A maintenance facility is proposed and would be located in an area out of the general public view, while still being convenient for maintenance staff. A secondary entrance to this maintenance facility from local surrounding public roads would be developed, if possible.
- The National Cemetery would be developed in phases. The initial phase (approximately 40 to 60 acres) would include the construction of the cemetery roads, entrance, Administration and Public Information Building, committal shelters, and maintenance facility. Each subsequent phase would include enough gravesites and columbarium niches as needed to accommodate approximately 15 years of burial demand. Cremation sites, casket gravesites, and columbarium would be developed in each subsequent phase. The size of each phase, and the total number of phases, is currently unknown. However, excluding the initial phase that builds much of the cemetery infrastructure and support buildings, each subsequent phase is estimated to include approximately 25 acres.
- Environmentally constrained areas, such as environmentally and culturally sensitive areas, and areas that are otherwise difficult to develop (e.g., steep slopes, erosional areas, etc.) would be left undeveloped and remain as scenic locations at the cemetery. The utilized portions of the site would be developed to within 20 feet of the site boundaries.
- The standard for NCA design is to achieve an on-site cut-and-fill soil balance as much as possible. Proposed development would primarily be located in relatively leveled areas, following natural contours to the extent possible. Areas may be minimally leveled to develop a consistent grade with each phase. Development would include the installation of grave sites, which would consist of gravel base, drainage piping, and pre-placed concrete vault/crypt system. Approximately 20 to 22 inches of soil would be placed on top of each vault/crypt. This design would provide the most space-efficient option. Each grave site would be marked with a small, upright marble headstone.
- Utilities, including potable and irrigation water, sewer, electric, and other supporting infrastructure would be extended to and throughout the site, as required.

Figure 2-1 provides an example National Cemetery design for reference.

Prior to construction, VA would obtain all applicable, required federal, state, and local permits for the proposed cemetery development from appropriate government authorities. VA would avoid any significant on-site environmental resources through sensitive site design, including avoidance of significant cultural and natural resources (e.g., wetlands, waterways, biologically sensitive flora or fauna, etc.).

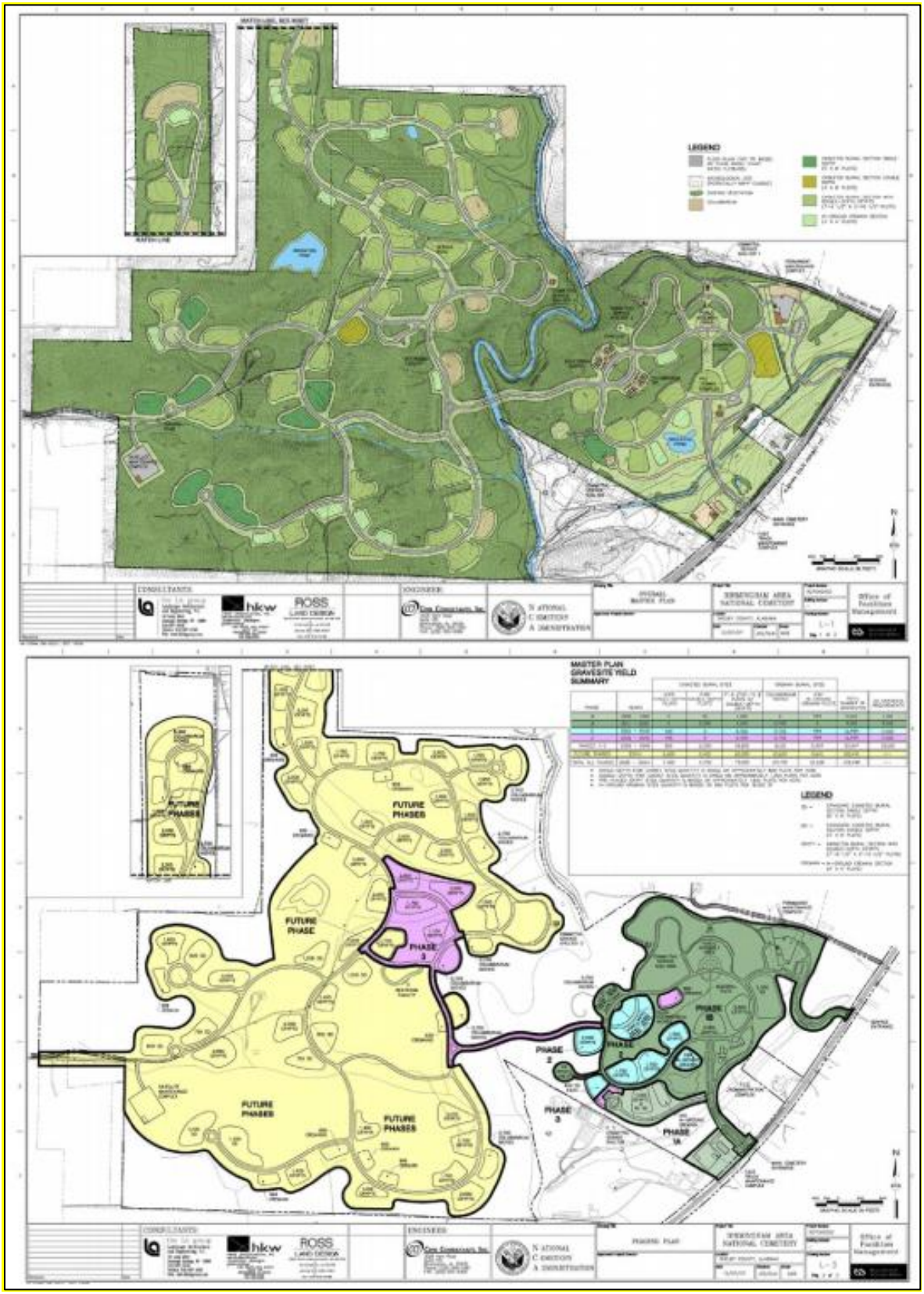

Figure 2-1 Representative (Example Only) National Cemetery Design Layout

2.3 Alternatives Development

NEPA, CEQ Regulations, and 38 CFR Part 26 require reasonable alternatives to be explored and objectively evaluated. Alternatives that are eliminated from detailed study must be identified along with a brief discussion of the reasons for eliminating them. For purposes of analysis, an alternative was considered "reasonable" only if it would enable VA to accomplish the primary mission of providing a suitable cemetery site that meets the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action, including availability at a price consistent with the fair market value based on an independent appraisal, or donation. "Unreasonable" alternatives would not enable VA to meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action.

VA considered the expansion of SFNC; however, land contiguous to the SFNC was not available for reasonable acquisition. As a result, VA concluded that a new National Cemetery near Albuquerque, best suited the purpose and need to fully serve the burial needs of central New Mexico area Veterans, the majority of whom live in the Albuquerque area.

After identifying a need for a new National Cemetery in the Albuquerque area, VA advertised its need for an appropriate site for the proposed cemetery. In 2017, VA published a Solicitation for Federal Business Opportunity (FBO), seeking offers for at least 200 acres of land suitable for cemetery development, located within a 15-mile radius of the Albuquerque. VA received several responses (i.e., offering of sites) to this solicitation. Through a comprehensive screening process, VA narrowed the number of viable sites based on analyses of site-specific attributes, including topography and natural aesthetics, soil/geology, environmental issues, site configuration, availability of utilities, existing structures and obstructions, site adjacencies, aesthetic quality and zoning, and accessibility.

Through this analysis, VA identified two suitable sites in 2017 that best met the screening criteria. These sites included approximately 225 acres of land located at the northwest corner of Northwest Loop Road and U.S. Highway 550 in the City of Rio Rancho, Sandoval County; and approximately 230 acres of land located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in the Bernalillo County (current Site). In 2017, VA initiated due diligence activities and a NEPA EA for the acquisition of one of these two sites for the proposed National Cemetery. However, based on the findings of the initial due diligence investigations, the two prospective sites were either later eliminated from consideration and/or were withdrawn by their respective offerors.

In 2019, VA published a second Solicitation for FBO, seeking offers for at least 200 acres of land suitable for cemetery development, located within an 8-mile radius of the intersection of Interstate 25 and State Highway 556, northeast of Albuquerque toward Santa Fe. VA received several responses to this solicitation. Through a comprehensive screening process, similar to that used in 2017, VA identified one site, an approximately 340-acre property located south of U.S. Highway 550 at its junction with Old State Route 44 in Rio Rancho, Sandoval County, that best met all of the established screening criteria. VA completed due diligence investigations and prepared a Final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Rio Rancho site in May 2021. However, the property acquisition process between the current owner (New Mexico State Land Office) and VA stalled and the process was terminated.

Consequently, VA reevaluated the originally considered prospective sites and determined the approximately 230 acres of land located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in Bernalillo County best met the need for the new National Cemetery. This Site is once more being evaluated for the proposed new cemetery.

2.4 Alternatives Evaluated in this EA

This EA examines in-depth two alternatives, the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative, defined as follows:

2.4.1 Proposed Action

VA proposes to acquire approximately 230 acres of land located at the southwest corner of Shooting Range Access Road and Atrisco Vista Boulevard in Bernalillo County, New Mexico and to develop it with a new National Cemetery. The Site is located in a rural but developing area in the north-central portion of Bernalillo County and south of the Double Eagle II Airport. The Site is currently undeveloped, generally level, pastureland. The majority of the Site would be developed, in phases, with the proposed cemetery. The Proposed Action would be implemented as described in Section 2.2.

The Proposed Action effectively provides additional land necessary to meet the regional National Cemetery requirements of VA. The location and current features of the Site are depicted on Figures 2-2 and 2-3.

2.4.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. NCA would continue to provide burial services at SFNC until the existing capacity is reached, after which the cemetery would be maintained and open for visitors but would be closed for new interments. Veterans and their families residing in central New Mexico would no longer be served by a proximate National Cemetery and would be required to travel a substantial distance for burial at a National Cemetery. The Site would likely remain undeveloped pastureland in the short term but could be developed for another use in the future.

The No Action Alternative would not enable VA to provide adequate National Cemetery facilities in central New Mexico and, thus, does not meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action. However, the No Action Alternative was retained to provide a benchmark for comparing potential impacts of the Proposed Action, as required under the CEQ regulations.

2.5 Alternatives Eliminated from Further Consideration

As described in Section 2.3, VA considered the expansion of the existing SFNC; however, land contiguous to SFNC was not available for reasonable acquisition. As a result, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

VA considered other offered sites in the Albuquerque area for acquisition and development of the proposed new National Cemetery. However, as discussed in Section 2.3, based on site screening evaluations, the findings of due diligence investigations, and/or land transaction issues, the remaining sites were eliminated from further consideration.

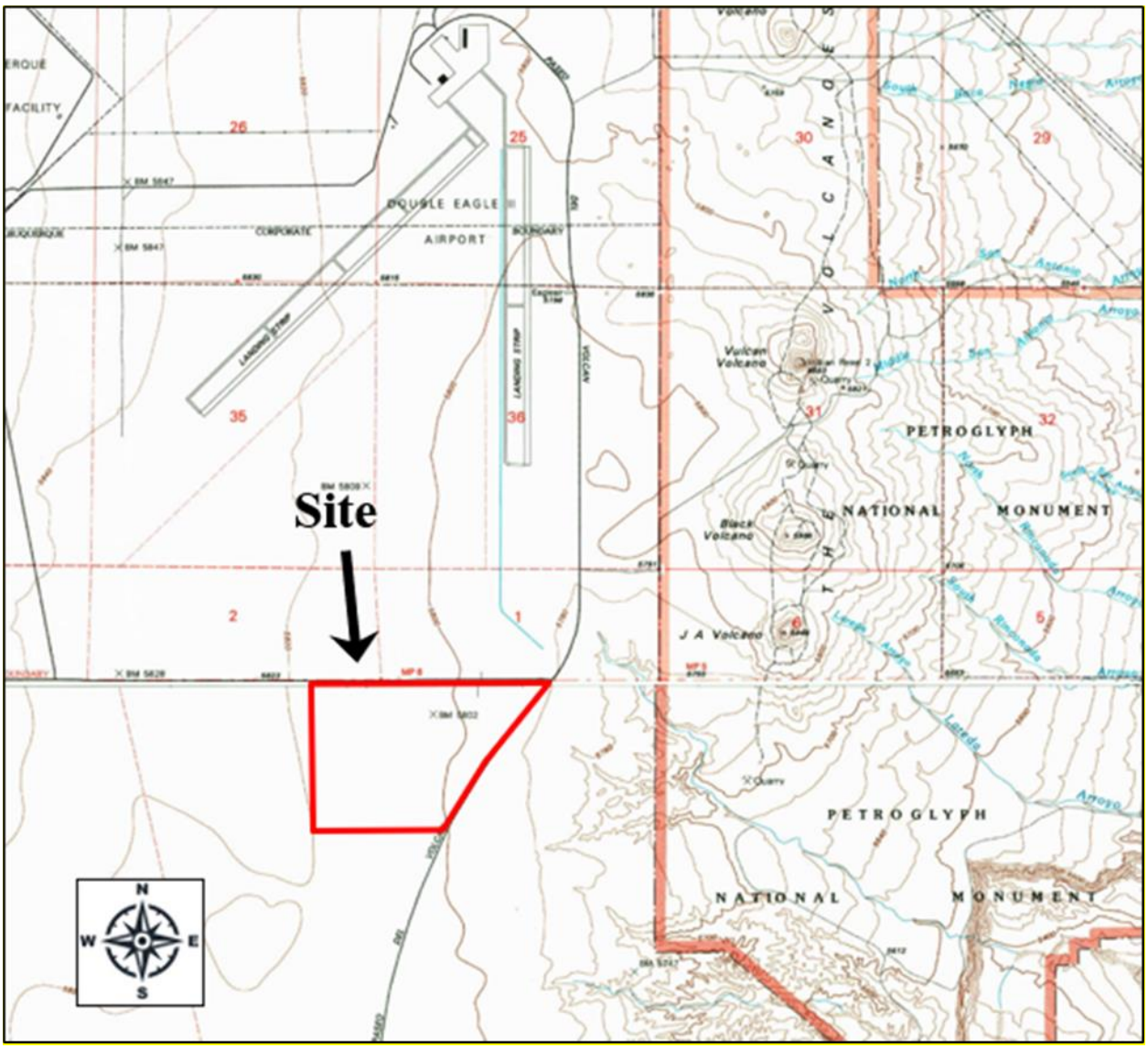

Figure 2-2. Topographic Location Map of Site (Volcanoes, NM 1990; and La Mesita Negra SE, NM 1990).

Figure 2-3 Aerial Photograph Site Location Map

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

3.1 Introduction

This Section describes the baseline (existing) physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions of the proposed 230-acre National Cemetery Site and its general vicinity (i.e., the Proposed Action's region of influence), with emphasis on those resources potentially affected by the Proposed Action. Appendix D contains photographs of the Site and the surrounding area. Under each resource area (Sections 3.3 through 3.17), the potential direct and indirect effects of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative are identified. Potential cumulative impacts are discussed in Section 3.18.

Resource areas considered in this EA are as follows:

- *Aesthetics*
- *Air Quality*
- *Cultural Resources and Historic Properties*
- *Geology and Soils*
- *Hydrology and Water Quality*
- *Wildlife and Habitat*
- *Noise*
- *Land Use*
- *Floodplains, Wetlands, and Coastal Zone Management*
- *Socioeconomics*
- *Community Services*
- *Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials*
- *Traffic, Transportation, and Parking*
- *Utilities*
- *Environmental Justice*
- *Cumulative Impacts*
- *Potential for Generating Substantial Controversy*

3.2 Criteria for Analysis of Impacts

Each alternative was evaluated for its potential impacts on physical, biological, and socioeconomic resources in accordance with the CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1508.8. The specific criteria for evaluating the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative are described in the following sections. The significance of an action is also measured in terms of its context and intensity. The potential environmental impacts are described in terms of duration, whether they are direct or indirect, the magnitude of the impact, and whether they are adverse or beneficial, as summarized in the following paragraphs:

Short-term or long-term: In general, **short-term** impacts are those that would occur only with respect to a particular time-lined activity, for a finite period, or only during the time required for construction or installation activities. **Long-term** impacts are those that are more likely to be persistent and chronic.

Direct or indirect: A **direct** impact is caused by an action and occurs around the same time at or near the location of the action. An **indirect** impact is caused by an action and might occur later in time or be farther removed in distance but still be a reasonably foreseeable outcome of the action.

Less than significant (negligible, minor, moderate), or significant: These relative terms are used to characterize the magnitude or intensity of an impact. **Negligible** impacts are generally those that might be perceptible but are at the lower level of detection. A **minor** impact is slight, but detectable. A **moderate** impact is readily apparent. **Significant** impacts are those that, in their context and due to their magnitude (severity), have the potential to meet the thresholds for significance set forth in the CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.27) and, thus, warrant heightened attention and examination for potential means for mitigation to fulfill the policies set forth in NEPA.

Adverse or beneficial: An **adverse** impact is one having unfavorable or undesirable outcomes on the man-made or natural environment. A **beneficial** impact is one having positive outcomes on the man-made or natural environment.

3.3 Aesthetics

The Site is situated in a mostly rural but developing area in the north-central portion of Bernalillo County, approximately 10 miles northwest of the center of Albuquerque. The Site is undeveloped, desert grassland that is used as pasture for cattle. The Site has relatively flat surface, with a slight slope to the east. An abandoned, unpaved road crosses the eastern portion of the Site from southeast to northwest. The Site features are shown on Figure 2-3.

The area north of the Site, across Shooting Range Access Road, is mostly unimproved desert grassland associated with Double Eagle II Airport. The airport has two runways. The 6,000 feet long, north-south runway is located approximately 3,800 feet north of the northeastern corner of the Site. The 7,400 feet long, southwest-northeast runway is located approximately 5,400 feet northwest of the Site. The areas east (across Atrisco Vista Boulevard), south, and west of the Site consist of undeveloped desert grassland. The surrounding land uses are also depicted on Figure 2-3.

3.3.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

After VA's acquisition, the Site would remain in its current configuration until such a time that the cemetery design process is complete and construction is ready to begin (approximately three years). VA's acquisition of the Site and initial holding of the Site as unimproved land would result in no aesthetic impacts.
Development and operation of the National Cemetery on the Site would produce visual changes, including the installation of a gated entrance and perimeter fencing, a one-story administration building and public information building, an assembly area, a memorial wall, two to four committal shelters, a loop road through the cemetery, casket gravesites, columbarium niches, and an one-story maintenance building/facility. Burial areas may be planted with turf grass, with surrounding areas likely consisting of natural vegetation. VA would design and develop the cemetery in concert with the Site's topography and features, with no major grading. It is anticipated the majority of the Site would be developed, in phases, for the cemetery.

Given the low visual impact of the cemetery development, which would be designed in concert with the existing topography and landscape, and would be generally consistent with the surrounding land uses, only minor aesthetics impacts would occur.

3.3.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no development or changes to the Site by VA would occur. The Site would likely remain unimproved land with no aesthetic impacts in the short term. Given the planned, ongoing development of the general area, the Site would likely be developed by others in the future, which would result in aesthetic impacts. The degree of the impacts would depend on the nature of the future development.

3.4 Air Quality

3.4.1 Ambient Air Quality

The ambient air quality in an area can be characterized in terms of whether or not it complies with the primary and secondary National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). The Clean Air Act, as amended (CAA and CAAA) requires the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) to set NAAQS for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. NAAQS are provided for the principal

pollutants, called “criteria pollutants”, which include carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.

Areas are designated by the USEPA as “attainment”, “non-attainment”, “maintenance”, or “unclassified” with respect to the NAAQS. Regions in compliance with the standards are designated as “attainment” areas. In areas where the applicable NAAQS are not being met, a “non-attainment” status is designated. Areas that have been classified as "non-attainment", but are now in compliance can be re-designated "maintenance" status if the state completes an air quality planning process for the area.

According to the USEPA Green Book website (October 2022), Bernalillo County is currently designated as a maintenance area for carbon monoxide and is an attainment area for the remaining NAAQS. Consequently, VA would be subject to the General Conformity Rule of the CAA for the Proposed Action for carbon monoxide.

3.4.2 State and Local Regulations

CAA sections 111 and 112 allow USEPA to transfer primary implementation and enforcement authority for most of the federal air quality standards to state regulatory agencies through a process called delegation. Pursuant to such delegation and under New Mexico law, air quality regulation in the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County is the responsibility of local government rather than the state. The Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board (ABCAQCB) and the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department - Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Program (ABCAQP) serve as the joint local authority to implement and enforce clean air regulations within the boundaries of the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County. Emission standards and procedure requirements to monitor industries are regulated through the issuance of construction and operating permits. New Mexico Administrative Code (NMCA), Title 20 Environmental Protection, Chapter 2 Air Quality contains the general requirements for construction permits.

The City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County manage local air quality through Chapter 9 Health, Safety and Sanitation, Article 5: Air Quality and Environmental Health Control of the Albuquerque Code of Ordinances and Chapter 30 Environment, Article II Air Pollution of the BCCO.

According to the ABCAQCB regulations, all internal combustion engines on equipment utilized as the primary power source, secondary power source or as standby emergency units (emergency generators), which emit greater than 2,000 lbs per year of any regulated pollutant must obtain a source registration or an authority-to-construct permit or both. An ABCAQCB Fugitive Dust permit is required for all projects that will disturb three-quarters of an acre or more of soil.

Based on the nature of the proposed cemetery development, it is not anticipated that an air permit would be required for the proposed cemetery operation. However, VA would secure any required minor air emissions permits from ABCAQCB, as appropriate and based on the final cemetery design. A fugitive dust permit would be required for the cemetery construction.

3.4.3 Greenhouse Gases and Climate Change

In December 2014, CEQ released its revised draft guidance for federal agencies on consideration of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the effects of climate change in NEPA reviews, which describes how federal agencies should consider the effects of GHG emissions and climate change in their NEPA decision-making documents. The guidance indicates that federal agencies should consider both the potential effect of a proposed action on climate change, as indicated by its estimated GHG emissions, and the implications of climate change for the environmental effects of a proposed action. The guidance indicates that the agency

analysis should be commensurate with the projected GHG emissions and climate impacts of the proposed action. It recommends that agencies consider 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions on an annual basis as a threshold below which quantitative analysis of GHG is not recommended.

3.4.4 Sensitive Receptors

CEQ's NEPA regulations require evaluation of the degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health. Sensitive receptors for air quality impacts include hospitals, schools, daycare facilities, elderly housing and convalescent facilities, and residences.

Sensitive air receptors in the vicinity of the Site include Petroglyph National Monument, located approximately 1,900 feet east of the Site and Southwest Aeronautics, Mathematics, and Science Academy (a charter school located at Double Eagle II Airport), located approximately 3,300 feet north of the Site. No other sensitive air quality receptors are located within one mile of the Site.

3.4.5 Effects of the Proposed Action

Air emissions generated from the proposed cemetery would be expected to have direct and indirect, short-term, and long-term minor adverse impacts to the existing air quality environment. Short-term increased air emission levels would occur as a result of the initial cemetery development and during each subsequent phase of cemetery expansion. Long-term direct and indirect emissions would occur during the operation of the cemetery as a result of visitor vehicle emissions.

Construction activities would be performed in accordance with federal and state air quality requirements. Construction-related emissions are generally short-term, but may still have adverse impacts on air quality, primarily due to the production of dust. Dust can result from a variety of activities, including excavation, grading, and vehicle travel on paved and unpaved surfaces. Fugitive dust air emissions would be greatest during the initial site grading and excavation and would vary day to day depending on the work phase, level of activity, and prevailing weather conditions. Dust from construction can lead to adverse health effects and nuisance concerns, such as reduced visibility on nearby roadways. The amount of dust is dependent on the intensity of the activity, soil type and conditions, wind speed, and dust suppression activities used. Implementing dust control measures (BMPs) greatly reduces dust emissions from construction. Construction-related emissions also include the exhaust from the operation of construction equipment, including diesel particulate matter. The use of newer construction equipment with emissions controls and minimizing the time that the equipment is idling (BMPs) reduce construction equipment exhaust emissions. Construction workers daily commuting in their personal vehicles would also result in negligible increased criteria pollutant emissions. Implementation of BMPs, discussed in Section 4, would minimize these anticipated less-than-significant adverse, short-term, construction-related, air quality impacts.

Bernalillo County is designated as a maintenance area for carbon monoxide. The general conformity provision of the CAA prohibits the federal government from conducting, supporting, or approving any actions that do not conform to a USEPA-approved State Implementation Plan (SIP), the state's plan for achieving and maintaining compliance with the goals of the CAA. Federal actions with emissions below de minimis levels are exempt from the general conformity regulations. Preliminary air quality modeling conducted for the Proposed Action using the USEPA MOtor Vehicle Emission Simulator (MOVES) program found that annual construction emissions for carbon monoxide, from the operation of construction equipment at the Site and construction workers commuting to and from the Site, would be approximately one metric ton per year, well below the general conformity de minimis level (100 metric tons per year). Therefore, the Proposed Action construction activities are not anticipated to impact the New Mexico SIP for Bernalillo County and are considered exempt from the general conformity regulations.

During operation of the cemetery, there would be vehicular emissions associated with Site visits by Veterans and their families. A minor long-term increase in local vehicle miles (and associated emissions)

is anticipated, as visitors and staff would travel to the Site (approximately 170 one-way vehicle trips per weekday). However, overall vehicle emissions would decrease because regional Veterans and their families would not be required to travel greater distances to other National Cemeteries and State Veterans Cemeteries once Santa Fe National Cemetery reaches its capacity and is closed for new interments. Preliminary air quality modeling conducted for the Proposed Action using the MOVES program found that annual vehicle carbon monoxide emissions associated with cemetery traffic would be less than two metric tons per year, well below the general conformity de minimis level (100 metric tons per year). Cemetery operational air emissions, associated with interments and grounds maintenance, would be negligible.

The Proposed Action would have a negligible contribution to long-term global climate change. Direct GHG emissions from the short-term use of vehicles and mechanical equipment during construction activities would cease after the construction has been completed. Indirect GHG emissions from the vehicle traffic to and from the cemetery are anticipated to be very minor. Preliminary air quality modeling using the MOVES program found that that annual GHG emissions from Proposed Action construction and operational activities would be less than 1,000 metric tons per year, well below the threshold of 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide annually.

3.4.6 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no air quality impacts associated with VA's Proposed Action would result. Once Santa Fe National Cemetery reaches its burial capacity and regional Veterans are interred at more distant National and State Cemeteries, Veterans and their families would travel greater distances, which would contribute to increased regional air emissions, a minor, long-term adverse air quality impact. The Site would likely remain unimproved land with no direct air quality impacts in the short term. The Site would likely be developed by others in the future, which could result in air quality impacts, depending on the future development.

3.5 Cultural Resources and Historic Properties

Cultural resources include both post-contact and pre-contact archaeological resources, as well as historic buildings and structures in the built environment. This impact analysis focuses on sites, districts, objects, buildings, and structures listed in, or eligible for nomination to, the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the regulations (36 CFR Part 800) for implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, and cultural items as defined in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

The Site has been mostly unimproved desert grassland and scrub land since at least the late 1800s. In recent years, it has been used as a pasture for cattle. A minor, unimproved road has diagonally crossed the eastern portion of the Site from southeast to northwest since at least the early 1900s. It appears that the road has been abandoned for many years.

Row 10 Historic Preservation Solutions, LLC (Row 10) completed an Initial Cultural Resource Impact Prediction (ICRIP) study for the Site on behalf of VA in 2017 and an updated ICRIP study of the Site in November 2022. The ICRIPs included a records and literature search of New Mexico Historic Preservation Division (New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office or NM SHPO), National Historic Landmarks (NHL), and NRHP data, and a pedestrian survey of the Site by an architectural historian. No NRHP-listed or eligible historic buildings, structures, objects, sites, or districts were identified at or adjacent to the Site. One significant historic property was identified in the vicinity of the Site; the western boundary of Petroglyph National Monument is located approximately 0.43-mile east of the Site. One of the principal cultural resources of Petroglyph National Monument, the Three Sisters or Albuquerque Volcanoes, a sacred landscape to many Native American groups, is located approximately 0.75-mile east of the Site. The ICRIPs

concluded the largely low-scale development of the proposed National Cemetery would have no long-term adverse effects on Petroglyph National Monument.

Okun Consulting Solutions (OCS) completed a 100-percent (Class III) Cultural Resource Survey (CRS) of the Site on behalf of VA in 2018. The CRS included a review of the New Mexico Cultural Resource Information System (NMCRIS) database, a 100-percent Class III pedestrian field survey of the Site by a team of archaeologists, laboratory analysis, and archaeological resources documentation. The NMCRIS database review did not identify archaeological sites at the Site. The archaeological survey identified one linear resource (the abandoned minor road) and 26 Isolated Occurrences (IO). Fourteen of the IOs contained pre-contact artifacts and 12 IOs contained post-contact artifacts. OCS and VA concluded these artifacts do not represent significant archaeological resources and are not considered eligible for the NRHP and the SHPO concurred with this determination.

3.5.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

Based on the findings and conclusions from the 2017 and 2022 ICRIP studies and the 2018 CRS, no NRHP-listed or eligible historic buildings or districts were identified at the Site or within the immediate Site area and no NRHP-eligible archaeological resources were identified at the Site. In addition, the low-scale development of the proposed cemetery would have no long-term adverse effects on Petroglyph National Monument. Therefore, no impacts to NRHP-listed or eligible historic properties would occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

In November 2022, VA initiated NHPA Section 106 consultation with the NM SHPO, City of Albuquerque's Open Space Division, NPS-Petroglyph National Monument, Albuquerque Historical Society, Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico, Historic ABQ (Historic Albuquerque, Inc.), Historical Society of New Mexico, National Hispanic Cultural Center, and 28 federally-recognized Indian tribes with geographic or cultural affiliation with the Site area. The Section 106 consultation letters included a description of VA's proposed undertaking (Proposed Action), definition of the area of potential effects (APE), identification of historic properties (the results of the 2022 ICRIP and 2018 Cultural Resources Survey), and VA's finding of effects on historic properties (i.e., no historic properties affected).

In a letter dated December 6, 2022, the NM SHPO concurred that there are no historic properties within the Site area. NM SHPO stated that Petroglyph National Monument is located within the visual effects APE; however, in their view, the undertaking would have no adverse effect on historic properties because the proposed cemetery will comprise a low-lying, landscaped area with few buildings. VA responded to the NM SHPO in a letter dated January 17, 2023 that was signed and sent January 19, 2023. VA agreed to expand the visual APE to include Petroglyph National Monument and accordingly changed the finding of effect from "no historic properties affected" to "no adverse effect" to historic properties.

In a letter dated December 14, 2022, NPS-Petroglyph National Monument also recommended extending the visual effects APE to include Petroglyph National Monument, recommended cemetery design that would reduce or eliminate visual impacts to the Monument, and suggested a "water-wise" design that incorporated low water and native vegetation. NPS also requested to be involved in the cemetery design. In a letter to NPS dated January 17, 2023 that was signed and sent January 19, 2023, VA agreed to extend the visual effects APE to include the Monument and shared, and stated their concurrence with, the NM SHPO response that indicated the undertaking would have no adverse effect on historic properties because the design of the cemetery is anticipated to be a low-lying (no elements over two stories), landscaped area with few buildings. VA acknowledged NPS' request for a "water-wise" design and indicated that it would be considered. VA also indicated that they plan to share cemetery design information with NPS and other interested consulting parties at the approximately 30%, 60% and 90% design stages for review and comment. VA will continue to correspond with NPS.

On December 7, 2022, the Pueblo of Tesuque expressed an interest in consulting on the undertaking but offered no comments. Historic Albuquerque, Inc. offered design assistance in the future, if needed, but did not request to participate in the Section 106 consultation. No other agencies or Tribes have responded or elected to participate in the Section 106 consultation process.

Section 106 correspondence is summarized in Section 6 and provided in Appendix C.

3.5.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no cultural resources impacts by VA would occur. The Site would likely remain unimproved land and no cultural resources impacts would occur in the short term. The Site would likely be developed by others in the long term, which could result in indirect impacts to Petroglyph National Monument, depending on the future development.

3.6 Geology and Soils

A review of the La Mesita Negra SE, New Mexico United States Geological Survey (USGS) Topographic Quadrangle dated 1990 and The Volcanoes, New Mexico USGS Topographic Quadrangle dated 1990 (Figure 2-2) indicated that the Site is located on the eastern side of the top of a large north-south oriented mesa (Albuquerque West Mesa). The surficial topography at the Site generally slopes gently down to the east. The Site ranges in elevation from approximately 5,820 feet above mean sea level (amsl) on the western portion to approximately 5,800 feet amsl on the eastern portion. The ground surface topography in the Site vicinity generally slopes down toward an intermittent tributary of Lareda Arroyo (elevation approximately 5,700 feet amsl), located approximately 1,200 feet to the east of the Site.

A Tapestry of Time and Terrain, published by the USGS and dated 2000, indicated that Bernalillo County is located in the Mexican Highlands physiographic section of the Basin and Range physiographic province of the Intermontane Plateaus physiographic region in New Mexico. Specifically, Bernalillo County is located in the Albuquerque basin (Middle Rio Grande basin) of the Rio Grande rift, a north-trending continental rift zone (a central linear downfaulted depression) with middle-Miocene to early Pliocene Santa Fe group alluvial sediment deposits (USGS 2000).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey indicated that the Site contains two soil types identified as Madurez-Wink association, gently sloping (majority of the Site), and Wink fine sandy loam, 0 to 5 percent slopes (southeastern corner of the Site). These fine sandy loam and sandy loam soils are characterized as well-drained with a moderately high to high permeability. Refer to Figure 3-1.

TTL Associates, Inc. (TTL) completed a Geotechnical Subsurface Investigation (GSI) of the Site for VA in October 2017. The GSI found the Site soils consists of predominantly silty clayey sand with gravel, silty sand with varying amounts of gravel, and poorly graded sand with silt and gravel to at least 10 feet below grade, the maximum extent investigated. No groundwater or bedrock was encountered in the geotechnical soil borings.

A geotechnical investigation completed approximately 2 to 2.5 miles southwest of the Site by X8e Vinyard in 2013 for proposed water system improvements found soils composed of sand, clayey sand, and silty sand to a depth of at least 46 feet below grade. No groundwater or bedrock was encountered in the geotechnical borings.

The Geologic Map of the Albuquerque–Rio Rancho Metropolitan Area and Vicinity (NMBGMR 2008) indicated that the Site vicinity is not underlain by materials conducive to karst conditions. The USGS Quaternary Faults Map internet application indicated that no fault lines are located at the Site. The nearest faults to the Site (all minor) are the County Dump fault located approximately 1,500 feet east of the Site, and an unnamed fault line located approximately 5,500 feet to the west. Refer to Figure 3-2.

3.6.1 Prime and Unique Farmland Soils

Prime farmland soils are protected under the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA). The intent of the FPPA is to minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary or irreversible conversion of farmland soils to non-agricultural uses. The Act also ensures that federal programs are administered in a manner that, to the extent practicable, will be compatible with private, state, and local government programs and policies to protect farmland. The USDA NRCS is responsible for overseeing compliance with the FPPA and has developed the rules and regulations for implementing the Act. The USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey indicated that none of the Site soils are considered prime farmland soils. UDSA NRCS stated that the Proposed Action would not cause prime or unique farmlands to be converted to non-agricultural use and is not subject to the FPPA.

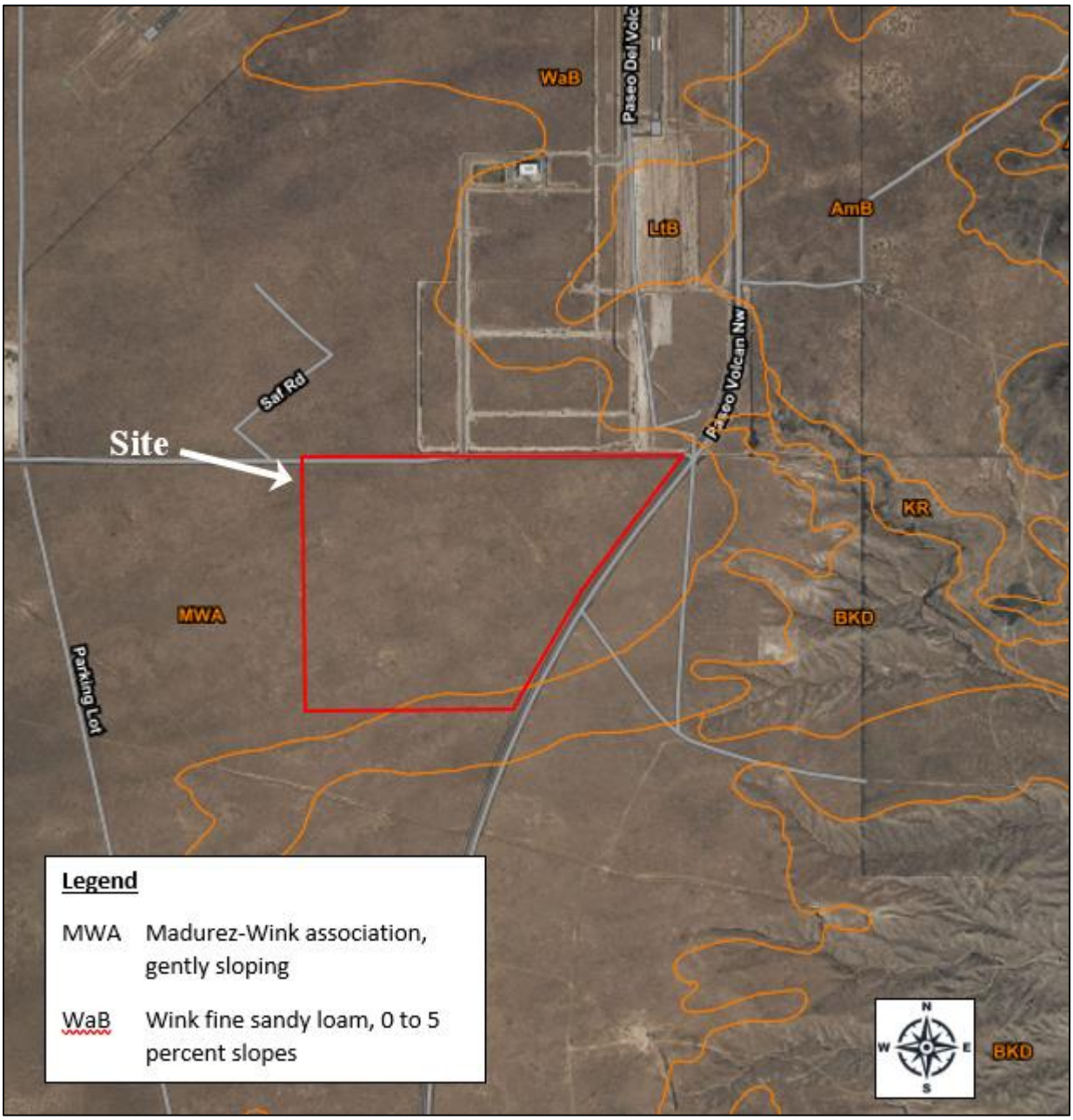

Figure 3-1 Soils Map

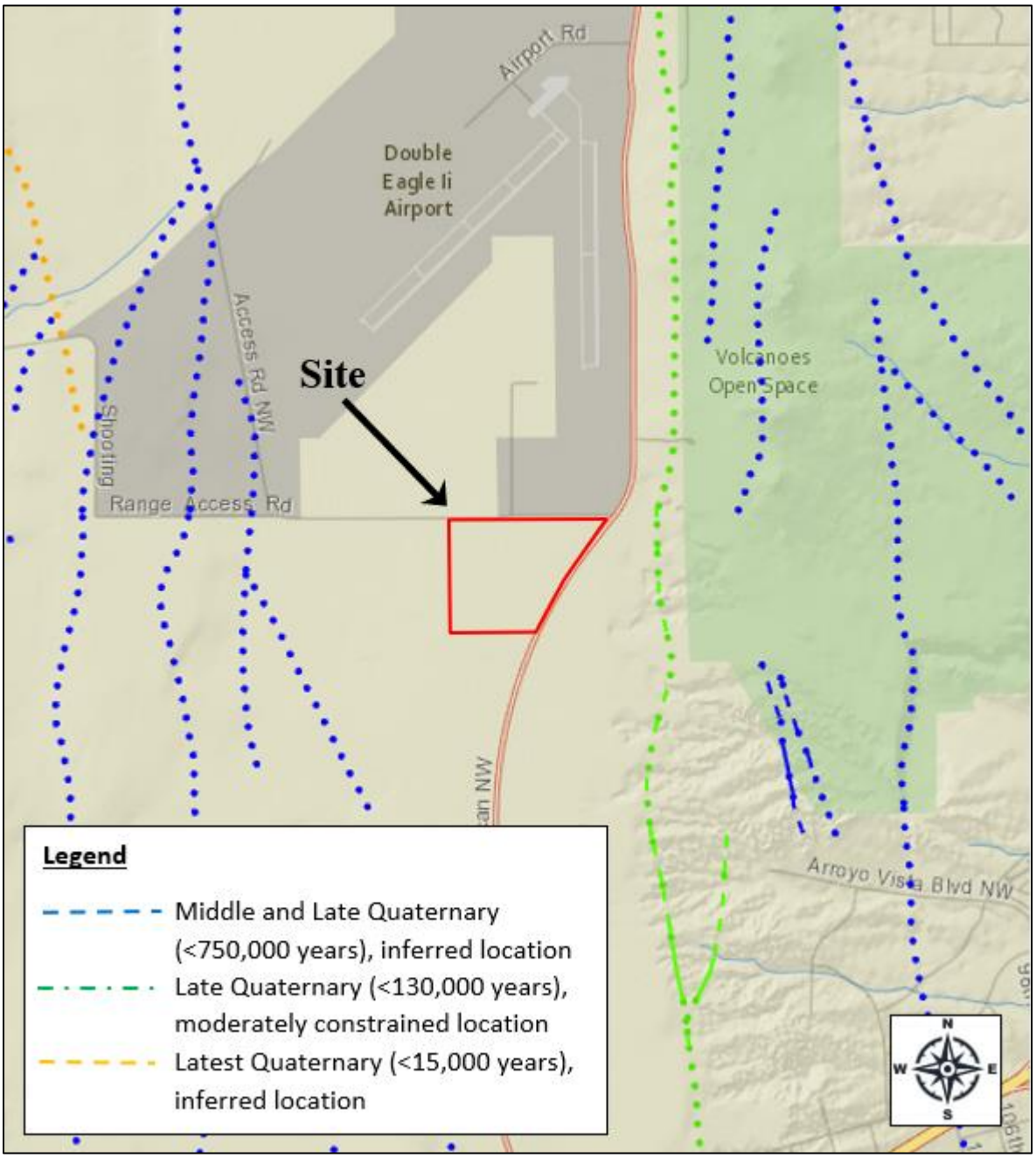

Figure 3-2 Fault Lines Map

3.6.2 Effects of the Proposed Action

The proposed cemetery development at the Site would have minor geology and soils impacts. No major changes to topography or drainage are expected at the Site due to the development of the cemetery. The cemetery would be designed in concert with the natural topography and current drainage patterns. No significant cutting or filling is anticipated.

Minor fault lines are located in the vicinity of the Site; however, no large, active faults are located in the Site area; as such, no significant seismic hazards are identified. Additionally, no impacts to mineral

resources are anticipated, as the proposed cemetery would not involve the commercial extraction of mineral resources, nor affect mineral resources considered important on a local, state, national, or global basis.

During construction of the cemetery, less-than-significant, direct, and indirect, short-term soil erosion and sedimentation (E&S) impacts could occur. Short-term soil disturbance would occur during construction, which would clear up to 60 acres during the first phase of development for the placement of roads, parking areas, buildings, grave sites, and other cemetery components. Cemetery construction activities would remove the current vegetative cover, disturb the soil surface, and compact the soil. The soil would then be susceptible to erosion by wind and surface runoff. Exposure of the soils during construction has the potential to result in increased offsite discharges of sediment-laden runoff. However, such potential adverse E&S effects would be prevented through utilization of appropriate BMPs as described in Section 4 and adherence to the terms of an approved USEPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction Stormwater General Permit (CGP), including the development and implementation of a site-specific Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), and the prevention of increased pre- and post-construction sediment yield and flow velocity. Permit standards would be adhered to during all construction activities.

No long-term E&S impacts would be anticipated due to the nature of the Proposed Action. There would be limited impervious surfaces associated with the cemetery development and long-term soil erosion impacts would be managed by maintaining appropriately designed stormwater management features associated with the proposed cemetery.

3.6.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no impacts to soils, topography, or geology by VA would occur. The Site would likely remain unimproved land with no soils, topography, or geology impacts in the short term. In the future, the Site would likely be developed by others, which could result in soils, topography, or geology impacts, depending on the future development.

3.7 Hydrology and Water Quality

This section describes the affected environment, regulatory setting, and potential Proposed Action impacts for hydrology and water quality (surface water and groundwater). Wetlands, floodplains, and coastal zones are discussed in Section 3.11.

The Federal Water Pollution Control Act, commonly referred to as the Clean Water Act (CWA), governs the control of water pollution in the U.S. The CWA authorizes the USEPA to regulate point sources that discharge pollutants into waters of the U.S. (WOTUS). USEPA implements the NPDES stormwater permitting program in New Mexico.

Under section 303(d) of the CWA, states are required to develop and update, every two years, a list of waters that are impaired by one or more pollutants. Impaired waters are those that do not meet Water Quality Standards (WQSs) for their designated use. After identification as impaired, the state creates and prioritizes Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) to target and implement pollution reduction strategies and watershed plans to improve water quality. The NMED Surface Water Quality Bureau (SWQB) oversees New Mexico's TMDL program for the 303(d) listed waterbodies.

Section 438 of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (EISA) requires federal agencies to reduce stormwater runoff from federal development projects to protect water resources. Section 438 requires any development or redevelopment of a federal facility with a footprint exceeding 5,000 square feet to maintain or restore, to the extent technically feasible, the predevelopment hydrology of a property with regard to the temperature, rate, volume, and duration of flow.

3.7.1 Surface Waters

The Site is located within the Middle Rio Grande Watershed and West Mesa Airport-Rio Grande sub-watershed. A review of the La Mesita Negra and The Volcanoes, New Mexico USGS Topographic Quadrangles indicated that surficial topography in the Site's vicinity is gently sloping to the east towards an intermittent tributary of Lareda Arroyo, located approximately 1,200 feet east of the site. The nearest drainage features in the vicinity of the Site include a channel on the adjacent airport property to the north and arroyos located east of the Site (see Figure 3-3).

A 2022 drainage features map obtained from the Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority (AMAFCA) indicates the arroyos east of the Site drain to the east, down the eastern slope of West Mesa, and discharge to the Ladera dam system, located approximately four miles east of the Site. The dam system eventually flows to the Rio Grande, located approximately six miles east of the Site.

This section of the Rio Grande (Middle Rio Grande Watershed) is impaired for aquatic life and recreation and TMDLs have been established. The Site does not directly discharge into an impaired watershed and at this time there is no sampling required for 303(d) impairment for the Site.

3.7.2 Groundwater

The Groundwater Atlas of the United States indicated that the Site is underlain by the Rio Grande aquifer system, which consists of a network of hydraulically interconnected aquifers in basin-fill deposits located along the Rio Grande Valley and nearby valleys.

Municipal water service is provided to the Site area by the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA), which uses a mixture of groundwater and purified surface water stored in storage tanks. The Site is not located within an USEPA-designated sole source aquifer area, per the USEPA Sole Source Aquifers internet mapping application.

No groundwater was encountered during the 2017 geotechnical investigation of the Site. Bernalillo County - Natural Resource Services (BCNRS) stated that the depth to groundwater in the area is likely several hundred feet below grade. One USGS monitoring well approximately four miles north of the Site was listed in the National Water Information System. The depth to groundwater for the well was measured at 899 feet below grade in September 2022.

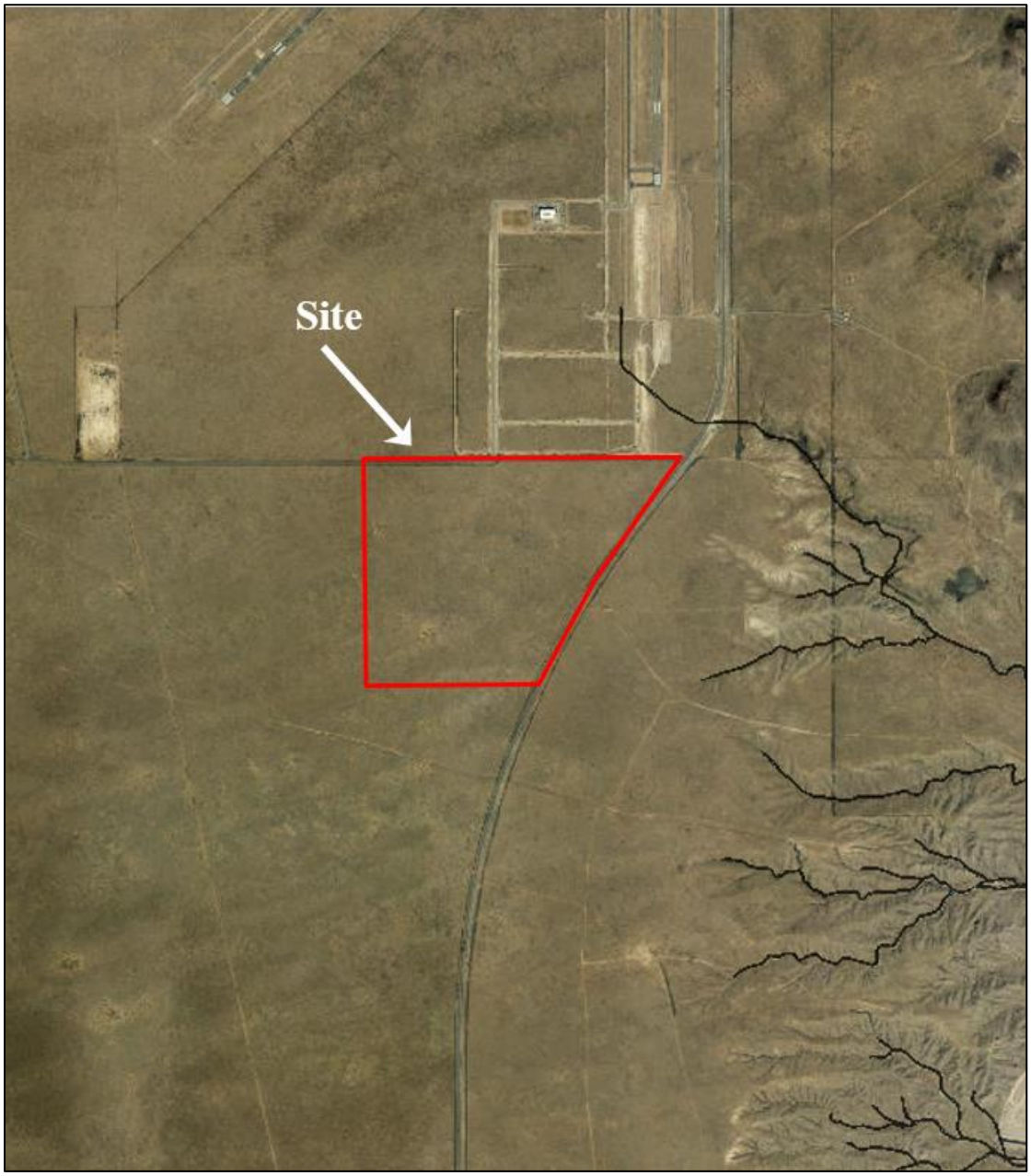

Figure 3-3 USFWS NWI Map

3.7.3 Effects of the Proposed Action

Surface water impacts associated with the cemetery development (associated with soil erosion and sedimentation) would be less than significant. The cemetery would be designed in concert with the natural topography and current drainage patterns. VA would implement BMPs described in Section 4 to control construction-related impacts of soil erosion and sedimentation.

NPDES general permit NMR04A000 offers discharge authorization to regulated Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) within the Middle Rio Grande Watershed. Bernalillo County Stormwater Program

has been authorized by USEPA to discharge under this general permit. VA would provide onsite stormwater management consistent with the EISA Section 438 requirements following the development of the cemetery and would adhere to the MS4 permit requirements for Bernalillo County.

Based on available information, groundwater is several hundred feet below grade at the Site and would not be encountered or adversely impacted during cemetery construction activities.

No significant long-term groundwater impacts are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Action. Based on standard modern burial practices, it is unlikely that toxic embalming fluid or other decomposition byproducts would be released into the soil and/or groundwater. The standard NCA design incorporates (for full casket burials) sub-surface concrete crypts, an entire section of which would be installed during site construction, above the water table. Using this technique, the caskets are not buried directly in the soil, but are rather set in a pre-placed concrete crypt (established turf and soil temporarily removed, crypt lid removed, casket placed, followed by the reverse process to complete). In addition, modern embalming fluids are markedly less toxic as the primary active ingredients are no longer arsenic based. Modern embalming fluids are commonly biodegradable. In addition, as selection of either cremains interment or columbaria placement increase, and green burials increase, the potential for soil or groundwater contamination commensurately decreases as no embalming fluids are used. Therefore, burial practices would have negligible impacts on groundwater resources.

During the cemetery design, VA would coordinate with ABCWUA to determine if the municipal water system has sufficient capacity to meet the irrigation needs of the cemetery. If the municipal water system does not have the capacity, VA would seek approval from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer (NMOSE) to install an on-site irrigation water well. NCA's modern cemetery development practices include the use of native grasses and drought tolerant vegetation species in non-burial areas, to the extent possible, thereby reducing the need for irrigation. With the approval of ABCWUA and/or NMSOE for the use of the municipal water supply and/or an on-site irrigation well for cemetery irrigation and NCA's water conservation practices, the proposed cemetery would have a less-than-significant impact on groundwater resources.

3.7.4 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no impacts to hydrology or water quality by VA would occur. The Site would likely remain unimproved land with no hydrology or water quality impacts in the short term. The Site would likely be developed by others in the future, which could result in hydrology or water quality impacts, depending on the future development.

3.8 Wildlife and Habitat

The Site can be generally characterized as unimproved, desert grassland and scrub land used as pasture for cattle. Vegetation at the Site is dominated by grasses interspersed with sagebrush, broom snakeweed, Russian thistle, narrow-leaf yucca, silver-leaf nightshade, cane cholla, whipple cholla, blue grama grass, and a variety of other grasses, shrubs, forbs, and succulents. Vegetative communities on the Site and surrounding area support wildlife species associated with rural Bernalillo County.

3.8.1 Threatened and Endangered Species

As part of the preparation of this EA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and various state natural resources agencies were contacted to identify the potential for the presence of state or federally listed species on or in the vicinity of the Site. In addition, TTL conducted a biological survey of the Site in October 2022.

The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) official species list generated for the Site (Appendix E) identified one federally-listed endangered mammal (New Mexico meadow jumping mouse), one federally-listed endangered bird species (southwestern willow flycatcher), two federally-listed threatened bird species (Mexican spotted owl and yellow-billed cuckoo), one federally-listed endangered fish species (Rio Grande silvery minnow), and one federally-listed candidate insect species (monarch butterfly). The IPaC report did not identify any critical habitat of protected species on or near the Site. Table 3-1 provides a summary of the federally-protected species listed in the IPaC report, their habitat requirements, and the potential presence of their required habitat at the Site.

Table 3-1 Federally Listed Species in the Vicinity of the Site

Species	Status	Habitat	Potential Habitat Present at the Site
Mammals			
New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse *(Zapus hudsonius luteus)*	Endangered	Riparian communities along rivers and streams, springs and wetlands, or canals and ditches that contain persistent emergent herbaceous wetlands or scrub-shrub riparian areas with an understory of primarily forbs and sedges and flowing water that provides saturated soils throughout the active season.	No
Birds			
Mexican Spotted Owl *(Strix occidentalis lucida)*	Threatened	Old-growth or mature forests that possess complex structural components (uneven aged stands, high canopy closure, multi-storied levels, high tree density).	No
Southwestern Willow Flycatcher *(Empidonax traillii extimus)*	Endangered	Dense riparian habitats with microclimatic conditions dictated by saturated soils, standing water, or nearby streams, pools, or cienega wetlands.	No
Yellow-Billed Cuckoo *(Coccyzus americanus)*	Threatened	Wooded habitat with dense cover and water nearby, including woodlands with low, scrubby, vegetation, overgrown orchards, abandoned farmland, and dense thickets along streams and marshes.	No
Fishes			

Rio Grande Silvery Minnow *(Hybognathus amarus)*	Endangered	Pools and backwaters of low-gradient creeks and small to large rivers.	No
Insects			
Monarch Butterfly *(Danaus plexippus)*	Candidate	Breeding areas are mid-successional grasslands containing a significant milkweed component (larvae feed exclusively on milkweed). Adult butterflies need nectar producing plants in bloom for food.	No

The Site does not contain the habitat required by the federally-listed species identified for the Site vicinity. None of these species are likely to be present at the Site.

The IPaC report also identified three Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) for the Site area. Table 3-2 provides a summary of the three BCC bird species listed in the IPaC report, their nesting habitat requirements obtained from the NatureServe Explorer internet application, and the potential presence of their required nesting habitat at the Site.

Table 3-2 MBTA Birds of Conservation of Concern Species in the Vicinity of the Site

Species	Breeding/Nesting Habitat	Potential Presence in the Site Area During Breeding Season	Potential Nesting at the Site
Bendire's Thrasher *(Toxostoma bendirei)*	Desert habitats with fairly large shrubs or cacti and open woodland. Nests on low trees, shrubs, and cacti.	Late July	No
Cassin's Finch *(Haemorhous cassinii (previously Carpodacus cassinii))*	Coniferous forests; and deciduous, scrub, and brushy areas during winter and migration. Nests in trees and shrubs.	No	No
Virginia's Warbler *(Leiothlypis virginiae (previously Vermivora virginiae)*	Breeding habitat includes woodlands, coniferous scrub, chaparral, and steep mountain slopes. Nests on the ground among leaves, small depressions, or under cover of bush, grass, etc.	No	No

One of the three BCC species, Bendire's thrasher, has the potential for being located in the Site area during its breeding season. This species is found in desert habitats with fairly large shrubs or cacti and open woodland and nests on low trees, shrubs, and large cacti. Based on their nesting habitat requirements,

Bendire's trashers are not likely to nest at the Site. There are no trees or large shrubs and minimal moderate sized cacti at the Site. The remaining BCC species are not likely to occur at the Site or vicinity during their breeding season.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) provided a list of special status animal species that may be located within one mile of the Site (Appendix E). Twenty-two animal Species of Greatest Conservation Need and three Species of Economic and Recreational Importance were identified for the Site area, including one state-listed threatened mammal species (spotted bat), one state-listed endangered bird species (aplomado falcon), and two state-listed threatened bird species (peregrine falcon and gray vireo). Table 3-3 provides a summary of the state-listed species, their habitat requirements, and the potential presence of their required habitat at the Site.

Table 3-3 State Listed Animal Species in the Vicinity of the Site

Species	Status	Habitat	Potential Habitat Present at the Site
Mammals			
Spotted Bat *(Euderma maculatum)*	Threatened	Desert to coniferous stands. Roosts in cracks and crevices in cliffs.	No
Birds			
Aplomado Falcon *(Falco femoralis)*	Endangered	Open habitats to woodland. Nests on cliffs, shrubs, and trees.	No
Peregrine Falcon *(Falco peregrinus)*	Threatened	Open habitats to forested land. Nests on rocky cliffs or crags or man-made structures.	No
Gray Vireo *(Vireo vicinior)*	Threatened	Semi-arid shrubby habitats, chapparal, and desert scrub. Nests in shrubs and trees.	No

The Site does not contain the habitat required by the state-listed species identified for the Site area. None of these species are likely to be present.

The 2022 NMDGF species report notes that burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia*), which are protected under the MBTA and by the State of New Mexico, are known to occur within or near the Site area. NMDGF recommended that a burrowing owl survey be conducted by a qualified biologist using the NMDGF's burrowing owl survey protocol before any ground disturbing activities occur. Should burrowing owls be documented in the project area, NMDGF recommended contacting NMDGF or USFWS for recommendations regarding relocation or avoidance of impacts.

In addition, in response to NEPA scoping for the Site in 2017, NMDGF requested that, prior to construction, the Site be surveyed for burrowing owls during the owl nesting season (April 1 through July 31). Should owls be found occupying the Site, NMDGF recommended implementing construction activities outside of the periods when owls would be present in their breeding areas, which could extend as late as October.

The October 2022 biological field survey identified numerous prairie dog burrows at the Site. No prairie dogs were observed; however, recent burrow activity was noted at several locations. Figure 3-4 provides the approximate locations of the observed burrows and their observed status. Prairie dog burrows provide potential burrowing owl habitat. One burrowing owl was observed near one of the burrows during the October field survey.

Figure 3-4 Observed Prairie Dog Burrows Map

The New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department (NMEMNRD) provided a list of special status plant species for the State of New Mexico. One state-listed endangered plant species (great plains lady's tresses) was identified for Bernalillo County. Table 3-4 provides a summary of the state-listed species, their habitat requirements, and the potential presence of their required habitat at the Site.

Table 3-4 State Listed Plant Species in Bernalillo County

Species	Status	Habitat	Potential Habitat Present at the Site
Plants			
Great Plains Lady's Tresses *(Spiranthes magnicamporum)*	Endangered	Wetlands, cienega wetlands, and stream sides.	No

The Site does not contain the habitat required by great plains lady's tresses. This species is not likely to be present at the Site.

3.8.2 Effects of the Proposed Action

Cemetery construction activities would result in direct and indirect, short-term, and long-term impacts to wildlife through displacement of common wildlife that inhabit or use the Site for nesting, foraging, or cover and potentially causing direct mortality to individuals of some species. Habitat associated with common wildlife would be impacted from the permanent conversion of unimproved land into the maintained cemetery grounds. The common wildlife species that could be impacted are widely distributed; thus, loss of some individuals and habitat would not measurably impact population abundance or the distribution throughout their range. Based on the large number of prairie dog burrows observed at the Site and the number of burrows with evidence of activity, prairie dogs would likely be present at the Site at the time of cemetery construction. VA would consult with NMDGF prior to construction to develop a plan to relocate or humanely remove prairie dogs that would be impacted by ground disturbing cemetery construction activities, as appropriate.

The cemetery development would have no effect on listed protected species or their critical habitats. No federally or state-listed protected species were identified at the Site. The Site does not provide suitable habitat for federally or state-listed protected species that may be present in the area.

Suitable habitat for burrowing owls, including prairie dog burrows, was observed throughout the Site. In addition, one western burrowing owl was observed at the Site during the October 2022 survey. Burrowing owls, protected under the MBTA, are likely to be present at the Site during their nesting season. It is anticipated that ground disturbing activities associated with the cemetery development would be conducted outside of the burrowing owl nesting season (April through October), when they are no longer present at the Site. If ground disturbing activities cannot be conducted outside of the nesting season, a qualified biologist would survey the Site for active nests in accordance with NMDGF's burrowing owl survey protocols. NMDGF and/or USFWS would be contacted for recommendations regarding owl relocation or avoidance of impacts if nesting owls are identified. Active nests would not be disturbed.

With the implementation of these management and avoidance measures, wildlife and habitat impacts associated with the Proposed Action would be less than significant.

3.8.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no impacts to vegetation or wildlife by VA would occur. The Site would likely remain unimproved with no biological resources impacts in the short term. The Site would likely be developed by others in the future, which could result in biological resource impacts.

3.9 Noise

The Site is currently undeveloped, mostly grassy pastureland with no notable noise generating activities or equipment. The existing noise environment around the Site is dominated by vehicle traffic along Atrisco Vista Boulevard and intermittent noise associated with vehicle traffic along Shooting Range Access Road and aircraft arriving and departing from Double Eagle II Airport. A shooting range is also located approximately two miles northwest of the Site. No other notable noise-generating sources are present in the immediate vicinity of the Site.

Double Eagle II Airport is a general aviation airport owned by the City of Albuquerque and managed by the City of Albuquerque Aviation Department. The airport has two runways. The north-south runway (Runway 17-35) is approximately 6,000 feet long and is located approximately 3,800 feet north of the northeastern corner of the Site. The southwest-northeast runway (Runway 4-22) is approximately 7,400 long and is located approximately 5,400 feet northwest of the Site. According to the Double Eagle II Airport website, the airport hosts approximately 120,000 annual operations comprising training, military, air ambulance, charter, private and corporate flights. According to flight data for the airport, there were approximately 20 to 80 flights per day between January 2020 to October 2022.

TTL completed a background noise survey at the Site in October 2022. The primary aircraft observed using the airport during the noise survey included small-engine airplanes and helicopters. During the noise survey, sound levels were measured at five locations across the Site during the late morning and afternoon. One monitoring location was located in the northeastern portion of the Site, in the area closest to the airport's north-south runway. Average sound levels at the Site ranged from 40.9 to 63 dBA (decibels, A-weighted scale) and were similar in the morning and afternoon. Sound levels were generally consistent across the Site.

3.9.1 Sensitive Receptors

Sensitive noise receptors in the vicinity of the Site include Petroglyph National Monument, located approximately 1,900 feet east of the Site and Southwest Aeronautics, Mathematics, and Science Academy (a charter school located at Double Eagle II Airport), located approximately 3,300 feet north of the Site. No other sensitive noise receptors, such as residential areas, schools, daycare facilities, libraries, churches, auditoriums, parks or designated natural areas are located within a one-mile radius of the Site.

3.9.2 Effects of the Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would have short-term impacts to the existing noise environment during the cemetery construction activities. Noise generating sources during construction activities would be associated primarily with standard construction equipment and construction equipment transportation. These increased noise levels could directly affect the neighboring areas.

Construction activities generate noise by their very nature and are highly variable, depending on the type, number, and operating schedules of equipment. Construction projects are usually executed in stages, each having its own combination of equipment and noise characteristics and magnitudes. Construction activities are expected to be typical of other similar construction projects and would include mobilization, site

preparation, excavation, placing foundations, pre-placed crypt installation, utility development, heavy equipment movement, and paving roadways and parking areas.

The most prevalent noise source at typical construction sites is the internal combustion engine. General construction equipment using engines includes, but is not limited to: heavy, medium, and light equipment such as excavators; roller compactors; front-end loaders; bulldozers; graders; backhoes; dump trucks; water trucks; concrete trucks; pump trucks; utility trucks; and lube, oil, and fuel trucks.

Peak noise levels vary at a given location based on line of sight, topography, vegetation, and atmospheric conditions. In addition, peak noise levels would be variable and intermittent because each piece of equipment would only be operated when needed. However, peak construction noise levels would be considerably higher than existing noise levels. Relatively high peak noise levels in the range of 93 to 108 dBA would occur on the active construction site, decreasing with distance from the construction areas. Table 3-5 presents peak noise levels that could be expected from a range of construction equipment during proposed construction activities.

Generally speaking, peak noise levels within 50 feet of active construction areas and material transportation routes would most likely be considered “striking” or “very loud”, comparable to peak crowd noise at an indoor sports arena. At approximately 200 feet, peak noise levels would be loud - approximately comparable to a garbage disposal or vacuum cleaner at 10 feet. At 0.25 mile, construction noise levels would generally be quiet enough so as to be considered insignificant, although transient noise levels may be noticeable at times.

Combined peak noise levels, or worst-case noise levels when several loud pieces of equipment are used in a small area at the same time are expected to occur rarely, if ever, during the project. However, under these circumstances, peak noise levels could exceed 90 dBA within 200 feet of the construction area, depending on equipment being used.

Although noise levels would be quite loud in the immediate area, the intermittent nature of peak construction noise levels would not create the steady noise level conditions for an extended duration that could lead to hearing damage. Construction workers would follow standard Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements to prevent hearing damage.

Areas that could be most affected by noise from construction include those closest to the construction footprint. Indoor noise levels would be expected to be 15-25 decibels lower than outdoor levels. In addition, cconstruction noise impacts would be temporary and would be minimized through BMPs outlined in Section 4. Noise contours depicted on Figure 3-5 illustrate the estimated peak construction noise levels at varying distances from the Site.

Indirect impacts include noise from workers commuting and material transport. Area traffic volumes and noise levels would increase slightly as construction employees commute to and from work at the project area, and delivery and service vehicles (including trucks of various sizes) transit to and from the Site. Because trucks are present during most phases of construction and leave and enter the Site via local thoroughfares, truck noises tend to impact more people over a wider area. For this Proposed Action, persons in the area near the Site would experience temporary increases in traffic noise during day-time hours. These effects are not considered significant because they would be temporary and similar to existing traffic noise levels in the area.

Table 3-5 Peak Noise Levels Expected from Typical Construction Equipment

Source	Peak Noise Level (dBA, attenuated)							
	Distance from Source (feet)							
	0	**50**	**100**	**200**	**400**	**1,000**	**1,700**	**2,500**
Heavy truck	95	84-89	78-93	72-77	66-71	58-63	54-59	50-55
Dump truck	108	88	82	76	70	62	58	54
Concrete mixer	108	85	79	73	67	59	55	51
Jack-hammer	108	88	82	76	70	62	58	54
Scraper	93	80-89	74-82	68-77	60-71	54-63	50-59	46-55
Bulldozer	107	87-102	81-96	75-90	69-84	61-76	57-72	53-68
Generator	96	76	70	64	58	50	46	42
Crane	104	75-88	69-82	63-76	55-70	49-62	45-48	41-54
Loader	104	73-86	67-80	61-74	55-68	47-60	43-56	39-52
Grader	108	88-91	82-85	76-79	70-73	62-65	58-61	54-57
Pile driver	105	95	89	83	77	69	65	61
Forklift	100	95	89	83	77	69	65	61

Combined Peak Noise Level (Bulldozer, Jackhammer, Scraper)					
Combined Peak Noise Level	**Distance from Source**				
	50 feet	**100 feet**	**200 feet**	**¼ mile**	**½ mile**
	103	97	91	74	68

Source: (Tipler 1976)

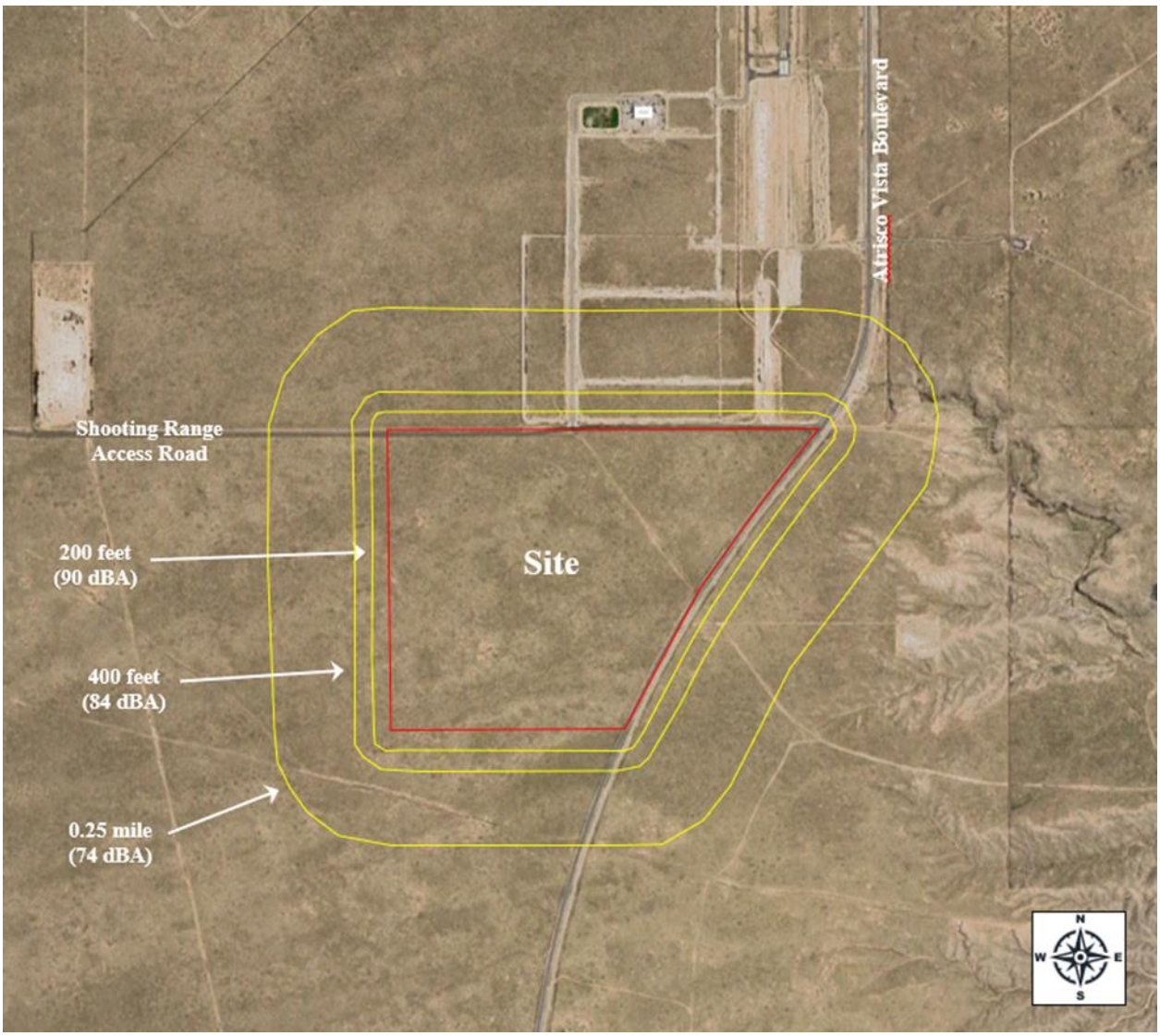

Figure 3-5 Estimated Peak Construction Noise Level Contour Map

Proposed operational activities at the cemetery would include vehicle traffic to and from the Site, use of powered equipment for grave site preparation, maintenance, and upkeep, and periodic (during weekday, day-time hours) ceremonial rifle discharges from the cemetery committal shelters. Estimated ceremonial rifle salute noise levels at varying distances based on U.S. Army estimates are provided in Table 3-6. The cemetery operational activities would not produce excessive noise and would not produce a significant adverse noise impact on surrounding land uses. The facility would be a relatively quiet cemetery.

Table 3-6 Estimated M-16 Rifle Blank Noise Levels at Varying Distances

Distance (meters)	A-Weighted Exposure Level (dBA)	A-Weighted Maximum Level (dBA)
50	67	76
100	61	70
200	54	63
400	40	49
800	32	41
1,600	22	31

3.9.3 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the noise environment surrounding the Site would not be altered by activities of VA. The Site would likely remain unimproved land with no noise impacts in the short term. The Site would likely be developed by others in the long term, which could result in noise impacts, depending on the future development.

3.10 Land Use

The Site is situated in a mostly rural, but developing area in the north-central portion of Bernalillo County. The Site has been mostly unimproved desert grassland since at least the late 1800s. In recent years, it has been used as a pasture for cattle.

The area adjacent to the north of the Site across Shooting Range Access Road contains unimproved desert grassland and scrub land associated with the Double Eagle II Airport; however, the area has recently been improved with underground utilities in anticipation of development of a technology park. The area adjacent to the east of the Site, across Atrisco Vista Boulevard, is currently unimproved desert grassland and scrub land used. The areas adjacent to the south and west of the Site are currently unimproved desert grassland used as pasture for cattle.

The Site is located within unincorporated Bernalillo County. The Bernalillo County Planning and Development Services (BCPDS) Zoning Map indicates the Site is currently zoned Sector Development, Upper Petroglyphs, Medium Density Residential (SD-UP-RM). This zoning allows for a mixture of uses controlled by a sector development plan which specifies new development and redevelopment when other zones are inadequate to address special needs. The Site is included within the Upper Petroglyphs Sector Development Plan.

According to the 2022 Albuquerque, New Mexico Integrated Development Ordinance, Part 14-16-3 Overlay Zones, the Site is located within an Airport Protection Overlay (APO) Zone associated with the adjacent Double Eagle II Airport. The APO Zone requires that development around an airport comply with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations to protect the public from noise, vibration, and hazard impacts of airport operations and to protect the safety of aircraft operators. Cemeteries are a permitted use within the noise contour sub-areas of the APO Zone.

The neighboring properties to the north are located within the City of Albuquerque and are zoned Non-Residential Sensitive Use (NR-SU). The neighboring properties to the east are in an unincorporated area of Bernalillo County and are zoned SD-UP-RM. The neighboring property to the south is in an unincorporated area of Bernalillo County and is zoned Sector Development, Upper Petroglyphs, Commercial/Light Industrial (SD-UP-C-LI). The neighboring property to the west is in an unincorporated area of Bernalillo County and is zoned rural agricultural (A-1). The surrounding properties are all located within the APO Zone.

Zoning designations for the Site and surrounding properties are shown on Figure 3-6. The APO Zone is depicted on Figure 3-7. The Upper Petroglyphs Sector Development Plan map for the Site area (dated 2021) is shown on Figure 3-8.

3.10.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would have less-than-significant land use effects as the Site is transformed from unimproved desert grassland used as a cattle pasture into a National Cemetery.

The Upper Petroglyphs Sector Development Plan targeted the Site for residential development and the BCCO does not specifically include cemeteries as a permitted use for the SD-UP-RM zoning designation. However, the proposed cemetery would be generally consistent with existing and on-going development of the Site area and would be compatible with surrounding land uses. In addition, as a federal agency, VA is exempt from local land use and zoning regulations.

The APO Zone requires that development around Double Eagle II Airport comply with FAA regulations to protect the public from noise, vibration, and hazard impacts of airport operations and to protect the safety of aircraft operators. Cemeteries are a permitted use within the noise contour sub-areas of the APO Zone. In accordance with FAA Regulation 14 CFR Part 77.9, construction that exceeds an imaginary surface extending outward and upward 100 to 1 for a horizontal distance of 20,000 feet from the nearest point of the nearest runway of an airport requires the filing of a notice (Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration Form 7460-1) with the FAA at least 45 days prior to beginning construction. Based on the distance of the airport runways from the Site and the low profile of the proposed cemetery buildings (not anticipated to exceed 20 feet in height), the proposed cemetery development would not pose a hazard for airport operations and is unlikely to exceed the imaginary 100 to 1 surface that requires FAA notification. However, due to the close proximity of the Site to the airport and the planned future extension of the airport runways, VA would coordinate with the FAA during the cemetery design and construction.

3.10.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no land use impacts due to VA's Proposed Action would occur. The Site would remain unimproved land with no land use impacts in the short term. In the future, the Site would likely be developed by others, which would result in land use impacts, depending on the future development.

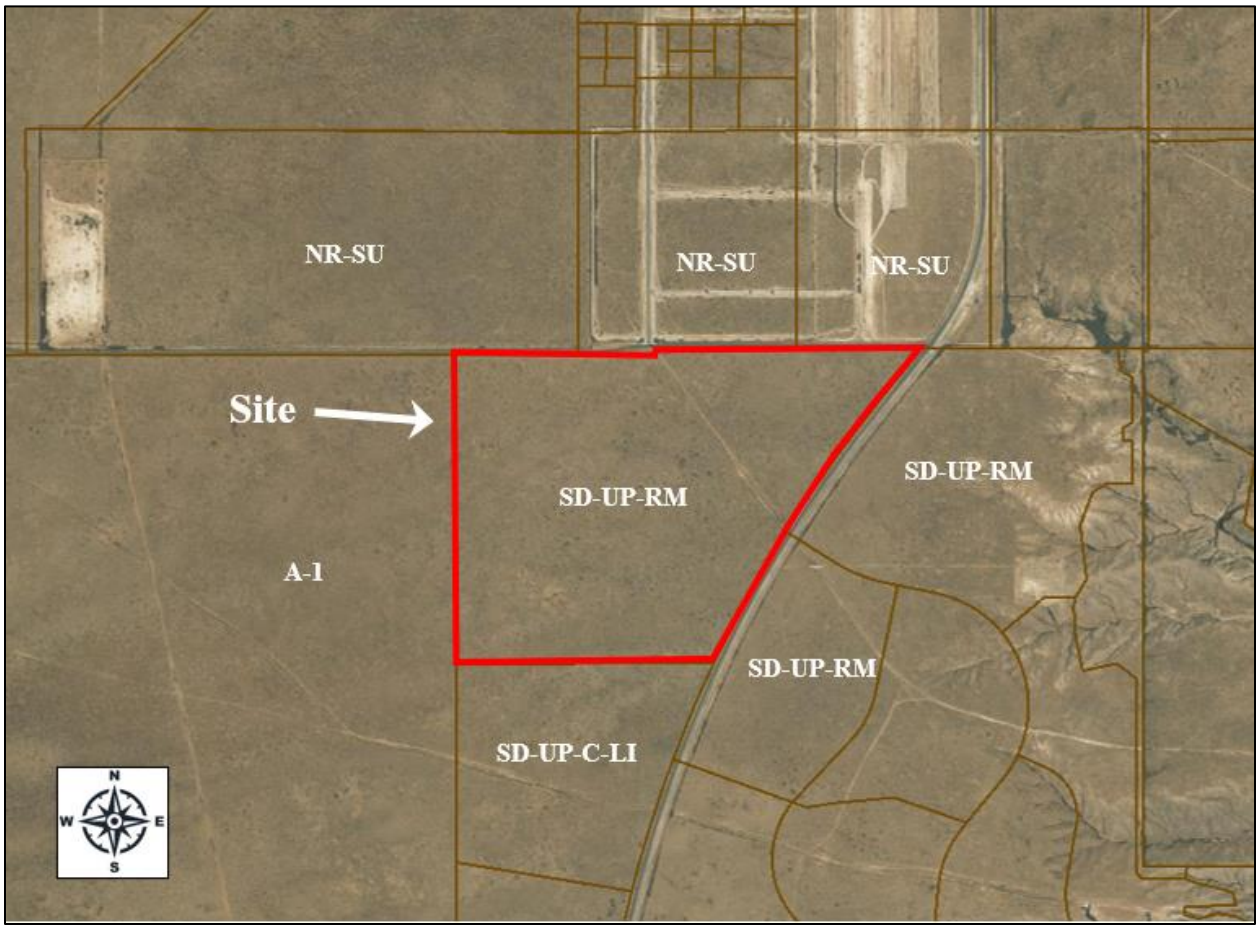

Figure 3-6 Site and Surrounding Area Zoning

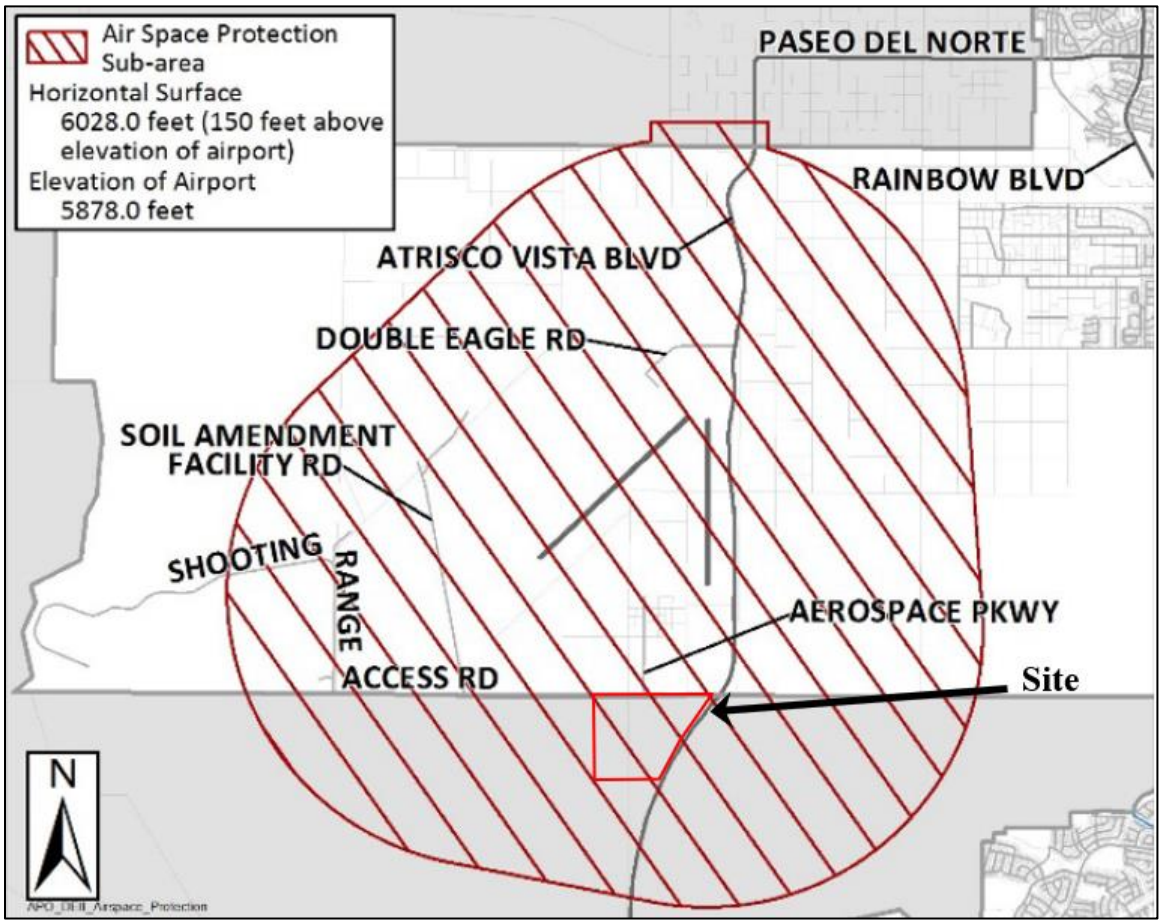

Figure 3-7 Airport Protection Overlay Zone

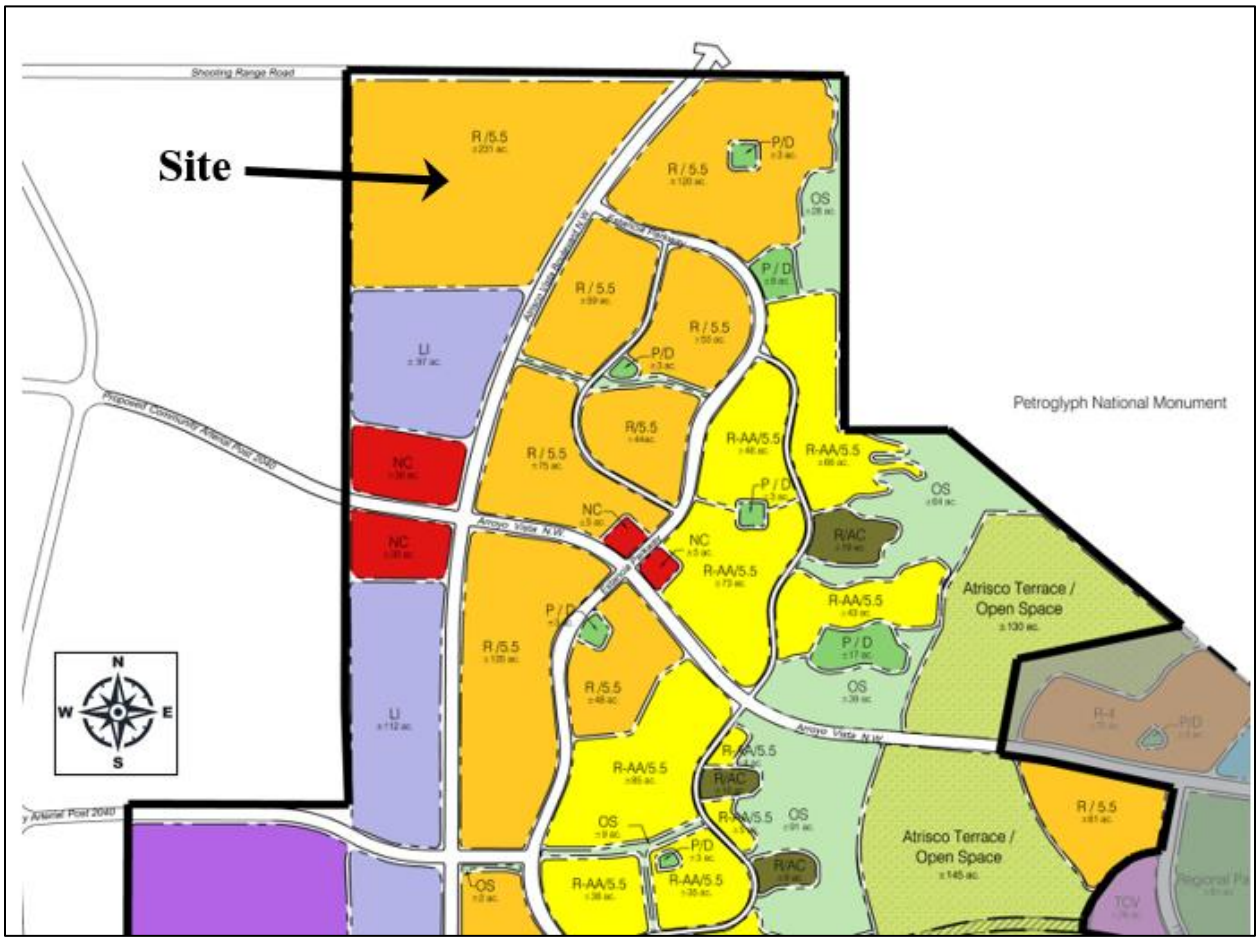

Figure 3-8 Upper Petroglyph Sector Development Map (2021)

3.11 Wetlands, Floodplains, and Coastal Zone Management

3.11.1 Wetlands

This section discusses wetlands at or near the Site and surface waters (streams) as they pertain to wetlands. Additional information regarding surface waters is provided in Section 3.7.

The USFWS National Wetland Inventory (NWI) Mapper did not identify any mapped wetlands at or adjacent to the Site (see Figure 3-3). In addition, no wetlands were observed at the Site during TTL's October 2022 site reconnaissance. In response to NEPA scoping in 2017, USACE stated that they do not have regulatory authority jurisdiction under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act or under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act at the Site (i.e., there are no USACE jurisdictional wetlands or WOTUS at the Site).

3.11.2 Floodplains

Available Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain mapping (FIRM Map Number 35001C0306G, dated September 26, 2008) indicated that the Site is not located within either the 100-year or 500-year floodplains. In addition, no floodplains were mapped on the surrounding properties.

3.11.3 Coastal Zone

The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) was promulgated to control nonpoint pollution sources that affect coastal water quality. The CZMA encourages states to preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore or enhance valuable natural coastal resources such as wetlands, floodplains, estuaries, beaches, dunes, barrier islands, and coral reefs, as well as the fish and wildlife using those habitats. The CZMA requires that federal actions within and outside the coastal zone that could have reasonably foreseeable impacts on land, water, and natural resources of the coastal zone be consistent with the state's federally approved Coastal Management Program (CMP). The State of New Mexico does not have a designated coastal management zone or CMP.

3.11.4 Effects of the Proposed Action

No wetlands or floodplains were identified on or adjacent to the Site and the Site is not located within a designated coastal zone. No impacts to wetlands, floodplains, or coastal zones would occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

3.11.5 Effects of the No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would result in no wetlands, floodplains, or coastal zones impacts.

3.12 Socioeconomics

The following subsections identify and describe the socioeconomic environment of the City of Albuquerque, Bernalillo County and the State of New Mexico. Presented data provide an understanding of the socioeconomic factors that have developed the area. Socioeconomic areas of discussion include the local demographics of the area, regional and local economy, local housing, and local recreation activities. Data used in preparing this section were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau through a QuickFacts report utilizing 2020 U.S. Census information and subsequent U.S. Census Bureau data, and the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis.

3.12.1 Demographics

The estimated populations in the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County in 2021 were 562,599 and 674,393 residents, respectively. The estimated total population for the State of New Mexico in 2021 was 2,115,877 residents (Table 3-7). Age distribution, high school graduation rates, and minority population rates s are generally similar for City of Albuquerque, Bernalillo County and the State of New Mexico. Minority population rates specific to the Site area are discussed in Section 3.16 (Environmental Justice).

Table 3-7 Demographic Data for Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, and New Mexico

Area	All Individuals (2021 Estimate)	Population Under 18 Age Years (2021 Estimate)	Population Over 65 Age Years (2021 Estimate)	Minority (2021 Estimate)	High School Graduates (2021 Estimate)	Veterans (2021 Estimate)
New Mexico	2,115,877	22.4%	18.5%	64.1%	86.8%	139.347
Bernalillo County	674,393	20.9%	17.4%	62.7%	90.3%	44,982
City of Albuquerque	562,599	21.8%	15.9%	62.6%	90.9%	36,639
Source: US Census Bureau, QuickFacts (U.S. Census Bureau 2022).						

3.12.2 Income

The City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County have similar median household incomes and populations below the poverty line as the State of New Mexico as a whole (Table 3-8). Household incomes specific to the Site area are discussed in Section 3.16.

Table 3-8 Regional Income for Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, and New Mexico

Area	Number of Households	Median Household Income	Population Below Poverty Level	Unemployment Rate (September 2022)
New Mexico	797,596	$ 54,020	18.4%	4.2%
Bernalillo County	277,653	$ 56,920	15.3%	4.0%
City of Albuquerque	236,191	$ 56,366	16.2%	4.2%
Source: US Census Bureau, QuickFacts (U.S. Census Bureau 2022) and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in States and Local Areas (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022)				

3.12.3 Commuting Patterns

Residents of Bernalillo County are largely dependent on personal automobiles for transportation to and from work. Public transportation is available in Bernalillo County through the Rio Metro Regional Transit District (Rio Metro) and ABQ Ride. The nearest bus stop is located approximately 3.7 miles southeast of the Site. The average commuting times for residents in Bernalillo County was approximately 23 minutes in 2020.

3.12.4 Protection of Children

Because children may suffer disproportionately from environmental health risks and safety risks, EO 13045, *Protection of Children From Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks*, was introduced in 1997 to prioritize the identification and assessment of environmental health risks and safety risks that may affect children and to ensure that Federal agencies' policies, programs, activities, and standards address environmental risks and safety risks to children. This section identifies the distribution of children and locations where numbers of children may be proportionately high (for example, schools, childcare centers, and family housing) in areas potentially affected by the Proposed Action.

Children are not regularly present at the Site, which is unimproved grassy pastureland. The nearest residential neighborhood is located approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the Site. Other than the Southwest Aeronautics, Mathematics, and Science Academy charter school located at Double Eagle II Airport,

approximately 3,300 feet north of the Site, no schools are located within one mile of the Site. In addition, no childcare centers or playgrounds are located within one mile of the Site.

3.12.5 Effects of the Proposed Action

The proposed cemetery development is anticipated to result in minor short-term, beneficial socioeconomic impacts to local employment and personal income by providing temporary construction jobs. However, due to the short-term, finite nature of this construction project, no long-term impacts to the construction labor force are anticipated. The Proposed Action would indirectly benefit the local economy through the spending of business and personal income generated from the construction and operation of the proposed facility, although these impacts would be minor. The Proposed Action would result in long-term significant beneficial socioeconomic impacts by providing a new, regionally proximate National Cemetery to serve regional Veterans and their families after SFNC reaches its burial capacity.

No adverse health or safety risks to children are anticipated to result from construction or operation of the cemetery at the Site. Children would only be present at the new National Cemetery as visitors. Construction areas would be secured to prevent unauthorized access by children from nearby areas. The construction contractor would limit, and control construction dust and noise as discussed in Section 4, thereby minimizing adverse effects to children in the area.

3.12.6 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Site would likely continue to be unimproved pastureland in the short-term, with no socioeconomic change to the Site area. No short-term or long-term socioeconomic benefit to the Site area due to VA's action would occur. In the future, the Site would likely be developed by others for another use, which could be a socioeconomic benefit to the Site area, depending on the future development.

Most importantly, the No Action Alternative would not enable VA to provide adequate regional burial sites commensurate with the long-term need for these services once the SFNC reaches its capacity, resulting in a significant adverse, long-term, impact to Veterans and their families. Veterans and their families residing in the Albuquerque area would have to travel much longer distances (approximately 140 miles) to the nearest National or State Veterans Cemetery for interment and subsequent visits, at increased cost and time. In addition, interment in a distance cemetery would reduce the ability for subsequent visits by Veteran families.

3.13 Community Services

The Site is located within the Albuquerque Public School District. The nearest schools are the Southwest Aeronautics, Mathematics, and Science Academy (charter school), located approximately 0.6 mile north of the Site, and the Tres Volcanoes Community Collaborative Middle School, located approximately 2.5 miles southeast of the Site. There are no other schools located within 3 miles of the Site.

The Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office provides police protection to the Site and its vicinity. The Bernalillo County Fire and Rescue Department provides fire protection and emergency medical services to the Site and its vicinity.

The Bernalillo County Department of Public Works and New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) provide local road and bridge maintenance services in the Site vicinity.

The nearest major medical facility is located approximately eight miles northeast of the Site.

Public transportation for the Albuquerque metropolitan area is provided by the Rio Metro and ABQ Ride. The nearest bus stop is located approximately 3.7 miles southeast of the Site.

There are no developed recreational facilities in the immediate vicinity of the Site. Petroglyph National Monument is located approximately 1,900 feet east of the Site.

3.13.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

The development of the cemetery on the Site would have minimal community service impacts. No significant additional load is expected to be placed on the fire or police departments as the result of the Proposed Action. Use of other public or community services as a result of the proposed cemetery would be minor. The Proposed Action is expected to have a negligible impact on local public services.

3.13.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Site would likely remain unimproved pastureland with no community services impacts in the short term. The Site would likely be developed by others in the long term, which could result in community services impacts, depending on the future development.

3.14 Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials

Hazardous and toxic materials or substances are generally defined as materials or substances that pose a risk (through either physical or chemical reactions) to human health or the environment.

TTL completed a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (Phase I ESA) for the Site in October 2017. The Phase I ESA did not identify any recognized environmental conditions (RECs) associated with the Site, nor any contamination or hazardous materials that would require special handling during cemetery construction. However, information provided by the USACE in a 2017 NEPA scoping response indicated that the northerly adjoining property across Shooting Range Access Road contained Munition Response Sites (MRS) and is a Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS). This area is the Former Kirtland Air Force Base Precision Bombing Range and contained World War II era bombing targets. The USACE stated that live and inert practice bombs have subsequently been found at this adjoining property and that live or inert ordnance may also be located at the Site due to its proximity to the bombing targets (although no targets were located at the Site). The USACE recommended third party unexploded ordnance (UXO) support be included in any future ground-disturbing activities at the Site.

On behalf of VA, 3 in 1 Geologic, Environmental, and Engineering Service, LLC (3 in 1) completed a Military Munitions and Explosives of Concern (MEC) investigation of the Site in November and December 2017 to evaluate the potential presence of MECs at the Site. The MEC report indicated that a large area north, northwest, and northeast of the Site was used for bombing practice during World War II. The vast majority of the bombs used were 100-lb sand-filled or concrete practice bombs that had a 3-lb black powder spotting charge that would detonate on impact and send up a burst of smoke for observers to tell the accuracy of the bomb drop. Upon graduation, each pilot could drop one or two 100-lb "live" bombs that contained high explosive. There were several practice bombing targets; the nearest practice bombing targets were located approximately one mile northwest and one mile northeast of the Site. There was only one "live" bombing target, located approximately 2.9 miles north of the Site. To further evaluate the Site for potential MEC, 3 in 1 performed a magnetometer-assisted visual survey of the Site along 18, 3 feet wide, north/south tending transects. No munitions-related debris was observed along the transects during the field survey. Although the there is no evidence of historical munitions usage at the Site, 3 in 1 recommended VA implement an Educational Institutional Control (EIC) to inform, educate, and protect all personnel performing intrusive work at the Site from injury in the unlikely event of discovering a MEC item.

3.14.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

The Proposed Action could result in short-term, less-than-significant impacts due to the increased presence and use of petroleum products and hazardous materials during construction of the cemetery. In addition, an increase in construction vehicle traffic would increase the possibility of a release of vehicle operating fluids (such as oil, diesel, gasoline, and antifreeze) and maintenance materials. As such, a less-than-significant, short-term adverse impact is possible. Implementation of standard construction BMPs (Section 4) would serve to ensure this impact is further minimized.

Cemetery operations would include the storage and use of petroleum products and hazardous materials (such as diesel, oil, and gasoline) for the cemetery excavators and landscape maintenance equipment. It is anticipated that one or more petroleum aboveground storage tanks (ASTs) would be installed within the cemetery maintenance area. In addition, following cemetery development, approved lawn fertilizers and lawn maintenance chemicals would be used in areas with turf grass per NCA policies and manufacturer application recommendations. No significant adverse long-term impacts during operation of the cemetery are anticipated; long-term operational solid wastes and hazardous materials would be managed in accordance with applicable federal and state laws and NCA procedures.

The development and operation of the cemetery at the Site would not result in a substantial increase in the generation of solid or hazardous substances or wastes, increase the exposure of persons to hazardous or toxic substances, increase the presence of hazardous or toxic materials in the environment, or place substantial restrictions on property use due to hazardous waste, materials, or site remediation. As noted in Section 3.7.3, based on standard modern burial practices and VA's cemetery design guidance, it is unlikely that embalming fluid would be released into the soil or groundwater.

Based on the results of the MEC investigation completed by 3 in 1, no munition debris is known or likely to be present at the Site. However, as recommended by 3 in 1, VA would prepare and implement an EIC to inform, educate, and protect all personnel performing intrusive work at the Site from injury in the unlikely event of discovering a munitions and explosives of concern item.

3.14.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no development or change to the Site by VA would occur. The Site would likely remain grassy pastureland with no solid waste and hazardous materials use, or effects in the short term. In the future, the Site would likely be developed by others, which could result in solid and hazardous materials use and impacts, depending on the future development.

3.15 Transportation and Parking

Traffic in the Site area is regulated by the Bernalillo County Department of Public Works and NMDOT. Local roads are maintained by the Bernalillo County Department of Public Works Road Maintenance Division.

Access to the Site is currently provided by Atrisco Vista Boulevard, a generally north-south oriented, two-lane road along the eastern Site boundary. Atrisco Vista Boulevard is designated as a principal arterial and is a two-lane undivided roadway with wide paved shoulders used as bicycle lanes in the vicinity of the Site. The road has a posted speed limit of 40 miles per hour in the vicinity of the Site. Traffic counts reported by the Mid-Region Council of Governments indicate that the annual average daily traffic (AADT) for Atrisco Vista Boulevard just north of the business park located approximately two miles south of the Site was 5,660 vehicles in 2021. Atrisco Vista Boulevard located north of Shooting Range Access Road had an AADT of 2,124 vehicles in 2021.

Access to the Site is also currently provided by Shooting Range Access Road, a generally east-west oriented, two-lane road along the northern Site boundary. Shooting Range Access Road is designated as a local roadway and is a two-lane undivided roadway with narrow paved shoulders in the vicinity of the Site. The road has a posted speed limit of 40 miles per hour in the vicinity of the Site. Shooting Range Access Road dead ends at the shooting range located approximately two miles northwest of the Site. No AADT data were available for Shooting Range Access Road.

Atrisco Vista Boulevard and Shooting Range Access Road intersect at the northeastern corner of the Site. The intersection is unsignalized. There is a dedicated left turn lane on north-bound Atrisco Vista Boulevard at the intersection and a dedicated right turn lane on south-bound Atrisco Vista Boulevard at the intersection.

It is anticipated that the main entrance to the cemetery would be located along Shooting Range Access Road. VA would likely develop a secondary cemetery entrance from Shooting Range Access Road for maintenance purposes only. Secondary site access drive usage is anticipated to be minimal. The locations of the cemetery entrances would be identified during the cemetery design.

Cemetery traffic would primarily approach the Site from Interstate 40, an east-west oriented, four-lane divided highway that passes through Albuquerque and intersects with Atrisco Vista Boulevard approximately 3.5 miles south of the Site. The eastbound ramps at the intersection are stop controlled. The westbound ramps are signalized. NMDOT is reportedly considering the signalizing the eastbound ramps, but no commitment has been made at this time. Interstate has an AADT of 35,731 vehicles near the Site.

On behalf of VA, Wells + Associates completed a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) for the Site in November 2022 to evaluate the existing (2022) traffic conditions in the vicinity of the Site and the future potential traffic conditions without and with the proposed cemetery in 2027. The TIA evaluated the following intersections:

- Shooting Range Access Road/Atrisco Vista Boulevard (1)
- Arroyo Vista Boulevard/Atrisco Vista Boulevard, a future intersection (2)
- Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Ladera Drive (3)
- Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Comfort Way (4)
- Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Westbound Ramps (5)
- Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Eastbound Ramps (6)
- Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Central Avenue (7)
- Proposed Site Driveway/Shooting Range Access Road, a future intersection (8)

Note: Number in parentheses denotes the intersection number on Figure 3-10 and Table 3-9.

Figure 3-9 illustrates the intersections listed above and their relation to the Site. Inset maps depict the projected future AM and PM peak traffic volumes in 2027 with the proposed cemetery at the intersections.

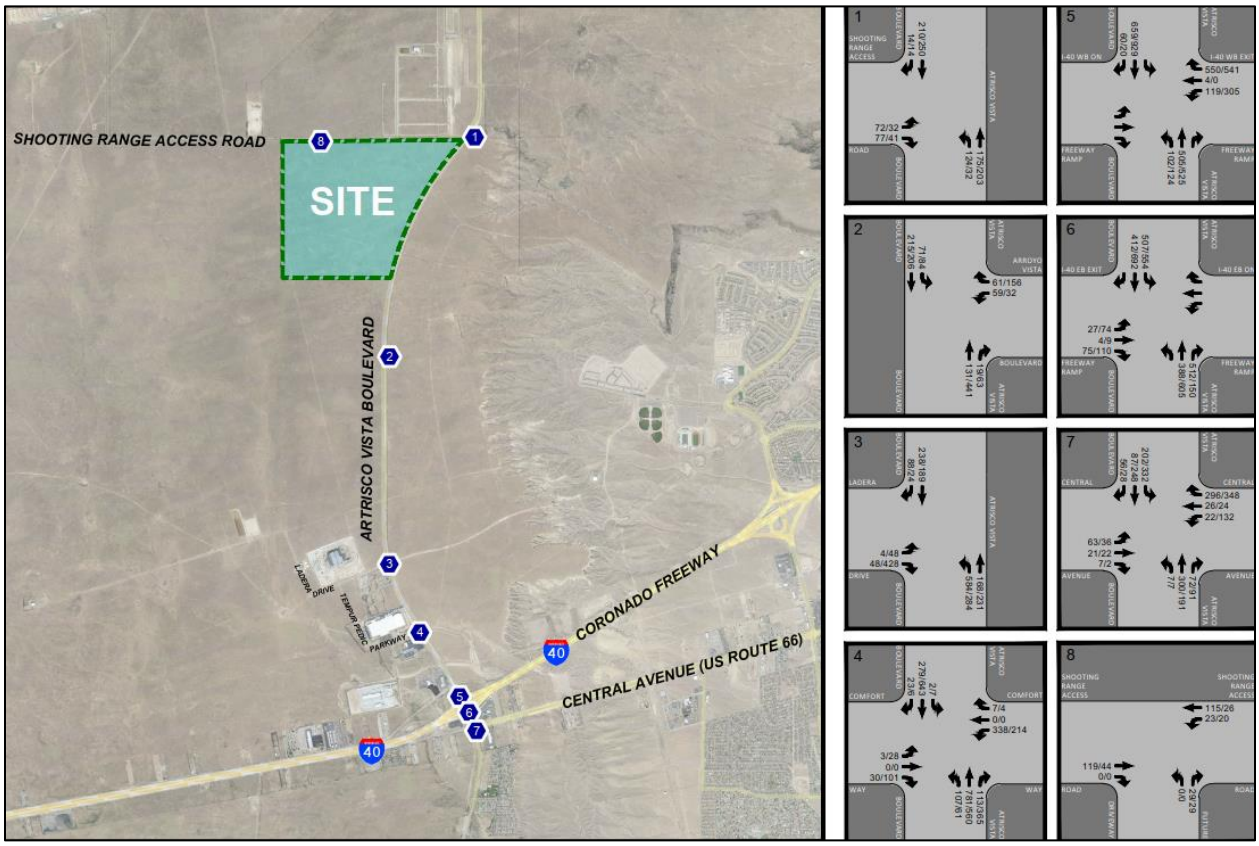

Figure 3-9 Traffic Study Intersections

2022 Baseline Conditions

The 2022 baseline conditions were developed using existing traffic count data and current road and intersection conditions. Traffic counts were collected on November 1, 2022, from 7 AM to 9 AM (AM peak) and from 4 PM to 6 PM (PM peak). The baseline condition analysis indicated that most of the study intersections currently operate at an overall acceptable level of service[1] (LOS) of A, B, C, or D during the AM and PM peak hours. However, the eastbound left turn movement at the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Ladera Drive intersection (traffic exiting the Amazon warehouse) currently operates at a LOS E during the AM peak hour, the eastbound left-through movement at the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Eastbound Ramp intersection operates at a LOS F during the PM peak hour, and the northbound left turn and southbound left turn movements at the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Central Avenue intersection operate at LOS E and LOS F, respectively, during the AM peak hour. Table 3-9 provides the LOS data for each turning movement at each intersection.

2027 Background (No Build) Conditions without the Proposed Cemetery

The 2027 background (no-build) conditions were developed using the 2022 baseline traffic with a background regional growth rate of two percent per year compounded per the Bernalillo County Department of Public Works. The traffic forecast also included trips generated by Phases 1 through 3 of the

[1] **Level of Service** – LOS represents a set of qualitative descriptions of a transportation system's performance. The Federal Highway Administration Highway Capacity Manual defines levels of service for intersections and highway segments, with ratings that range from A (best) to F (worst). Generally, a LOS of D or higher is considered acceptable by transportation planning agencies.

planned Upper Petroglyphs development. The TIA assumed this development would be completed by 2027, would include of 399 senior adult housing units, 1,266 single-family detached housing units, and 167 industrial park jobs, and would generate 1,092 new AM peak hour trips, 1,381 new PM peak hour trips, and 13,250 new daily weekday trips. The 2027 background conditions analysis also included the planned extension of Arroyo Vista Boulevard to Atrisco Vista Boulevard as part of the Upper Petroglyphs development.

The 2027 background conditions analysis found that delays at the study intersection would increase as a result of the traffic generated by the regional growth and the Upper Petroglyphs development. Most of the study intersections would continue to operate consistent with existing conditions. However, the eastbound left-through movement at the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Eastbound Ramps intersection and the eastbound left movement at the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Ladera Drive intersection (traffic exiting the Amazon warehouse) would degrade to an LOS F during the AM peak hour. The results of the analysis are provided in Table 3-9.

The TIA reported that the Atrisco Vista Boulevard and I-40 Interchange is being evaluated by NMDOT as a result of the anticipated development in the area. The study analyzed several design alternatives, but it is expected intersections along Atrisco Vista Boulevard will be signalized as in the future as Upper Petroglyphs and other nearby development proceeds. The TIA stated that with expected NMDOT improvements in place, the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Eastbound Ramps intersection is anticipated to operate at acceptable levels of service.

2027 Conditions with the Proposed Cemetery

The TIA also evaluated the conditions on local roads in 2027 based on the 2027 background conditions plus the traffic generated by the proposed cemetery. The number of vehicle trips that would be generated by the proposed cemetery was estimated based on rates derived from traffic counts at an existing 120-acre National Cemetery in December 2021, scaled up for the full 230-acre Site.

The proposed cemetery was conservatively estimated to generate 52 new AM peak hour trips (23 in and 29 out), 48 new PM peak hour trips (20 in and 29 out), and 679 average daily weekday trips. VA estimates the proposed cemetery would generate an average of 340 daily weekday trips. The TIA found that traffic generated by the cemetery would result in slightly increased delays at the studied intersections over the 2027 background conditions; however, the intersections would operate consistent with the 2027 background conditions. The results of the analysis are provided in Table 3-9.

Table 3-9 Existing and 2027 Traffic Conditions with Proposed Cemetery

Approach/ Lane Group	Existing Conditions						No-Build (2027) Conditions						Build (2027) Conditions					
	AM Peak Hour			PM Peak Hour			AM Peak Hour			PM Peak Hour			AM Peak Hour			PM Peak Hour		
	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio
1. Shooting Range Road/Atrisco Vista Boulevard - Unsignalized																		
EBLR	B	12.4	0.18	B	10.8	0.06	B	13.9	0.23	B	11.8	0.08	B	14.4	0.28	B	11.7	0.12
NBL	A	7.8	0.07	A	7.6	0.01	A	8	0.08	A	7.8	0.01	A	8.0	0.10	A	7.8	0.03
NBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0
SBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0
SBR	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.0
2. Arroyo Vista Boulevard/Atrisco Vista Boulevard - Unsignalized																		
WBLR							B	11.4	0.18	C	15.5	0.36	B	11.8	0.19	C	16.2	0.37
NBTR		FUTURE INTERSECTION					A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
SBLT							A	7.6	0.05	A	8.6	0.08	A	7.6	0.05	A	8.7	0.08
3. Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Ladera Drive - Unsignalized																		
EBL	E	47.8	0.05	C	21.9	0.18	F	62.1	0.06	C	24.5	0.21	F	67	0.07	D	26.4	0.22
EBR	A	9.1	0.05	B	12.1	0.46	A	9.7	0.06	B	12.9	0.49	A	9.9	0.06	B	13.5	0.50
NBL	A	9.6	0.43	A	8.1	0.20	B	10.4	0.47	A	8.3	0.20	B	10.6	0.48	A	8.4	0.21
NBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
SBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
SBR	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
4. Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Comfort Way - Unsignalized/Signalized																		
EBL	A	0.0	0.00	C	23.4	0.02												
EBR	A	9.7	0.03	B	10.3	0.05												
NBL	A	7.7	0.03	A	8.7	0.04												
NBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00												
SBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00												
SBR	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00												
EBL							D	35.7	0.02	D	35.5	0.10	D	40.2	0.03	D	35.9	0.10
EBTR							D	48.5	0.53	D	50.1	0.75	D	48.5	0.53	D	50.6	0.75
WBL							C	31.0	0.72	C	33.5	0.64	C	31.1	0.72	C	33.9	0.64
WBTR							C	29.0	0.02	C	33.1	0.02	C	25.3	0.02	C	33.4	0.02
NBL							B	10.7	0.19	B	12.5	0.17	B	10.9	0.20	B	12.9	0.18
NBTR							D	44.6	0.98	D	42.4	0.97	D	50.8	1.00	D	46.3	0.99
SBL							C	20.7	0.02	C	21.8	0.06	C	21.7	0.02	C	22.9	0.07
SBTR							B	15.0	0.33	B	17.6	0.65	B	15.3	0.36	B	18.3	0.68
Overall							**C**	**34.6**		**C**	**32.8**		**D**	**37.7**		**C**	**34.8**	
5. Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Westbound Ramp - Signalized																		
WBLT	B	15.1	0.18	C	22.6	0.48	B	15.2	0.20	C	23.2	0.53	B	15.2	0.20	C	23.2	0.53
WBR	B	16.6	0.38	C	20.1	0.25	B	18.2	0.55	C	23.6	0.59	B	18.4	0.56	C	23.9	0.60
NBL	B	14.0	0.19	B	13.3	0.26	B	16.4	0.34	B	15.9	0.40	B	16.6	0.35	B	16.2	0.41
NBT	B	13.0	0.26	B	11.3	0.21	B	13.6	0.33	B	11.9	0.29	B	13.6	0.33	B	12.0	0.29
SBTR	B	19.9	0.25	B	19.9	0.39	C	29.7	0.68	C	25.3	0.64	C	30.8	0.71	C	25.9	0.66
Overall	**B**	**15.8**		**B**	**17.8**		**C**	**20.8**		**C**	**21.2**		**C**	**21.4**		**C**	**21.6**	
6. Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Eastbound Ramps - Unsignalized																		
EBLT	C	22.0	0.12	F	122.4	0.78	F	793.4	1.72	F	2544.8	5.53	F	1110.6	2.21	F	2997.9	6.39
EBR	B	10.0	0.09	B	11.1	0.15	B	10.5	0.10	B	12.0	0.18	B	10.6	0.10	B	12.1	0.18
NBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
NBR	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
SBL	B	11.3	0.21	B	10.3	0.30	D	27.3	0.77	C	16.6	0.64	D	30.5	0.81	C	17.5	0.67
SBT	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
7. Atrisco Vista Boulevard/Central Avenue - Signalized																		
EBL	C	31.2	0.22	C	24.8	0.10	C	31.0	0.24	C	24.9	0.11	C	31.0	0.24	C	24.9	0.11
EBTR	C	31.8	0.05	C	27.2	0.04	C	31.7	0.05	C	27.5	0.04	C	31.7	0.05	C	27.5	0.04
WBL	C	33.3	0.09	C	24.2	0.30	C	33.2	0.10	C	24.2	0.32	C	33.2	0.1	C	24.2	0.32
WBT	C	34.7	0.06	C	25.3	0.03	C	34.7	0.07	C	25.2	0.03	C	34.7	0.07	C	25.2	0.03
WBR	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
NBL	E	58.7	0.57	D	44.5	0.49	E	57.2	0.58	D	43.7	0.49	E	57.2	0.58	D	43.7	0.49
NBT	B	11.6	0.15	B	17.6	0.15	B	12.0	0.18	C	21.9	0.22	B	12.0	0.18	C	22.1	0.23
NBR	B	10.3	0.08	B	14.2	0.14	B	10.5	0.09	B	17.6	0.18	B	10.5	0.09	B	17.8	0.18
SBL	F	171.1	1.14	C	30.4	0.86	F	541.2	2.04	C	34.3	0.90	F	559.3	2.08	C	34.7	0.90
SBT	A	7.8	0.03	B	10.0	0.12	A	8.1	0.04	B	10.6	0.15	A	8.1	0.05	B	10.6	0.15
SBR	A	6.0	0.06	A	7.9	0.04	A	6.1	0.07	A	8.2	0.04	A	6.1	0.07	A	8.2	0.04
Overall	**D**	**40.8**		**C**	**20.3**		**F**	**137.5**		**C**	**23.1**		**F**	**142.8**		**C**	**23.2**	
Improvement - Signal Timing Optimization																		
EBL													C	31.0	0.24			
EBTR													C	31.7	0.05			
WBL													C	33.2	0.10			
WBT													C	34.7	0.07			
WBR													0	0.0	0.00			
NBL													E	57.2	0.58			
NBT													B	17.7	0.23			
NBR													B	15.6	0.11			
SBL													E	70.1	0.91			
SBT													A	8.1	0.05			
SBR													A	6.1	0.07			
Overall													**C**	**30.7**				
8. Proposed Site Driveway/Shooting Range Road - Unsignalized																		
EBTR													A	0.0	0.00	A	0.0	0.00
WBLT		FUTURE INTERSECTION						FUTURE INTERSECTION					A	7.5	0.02	A	7.3	0.01
NBLR													A	9.0	0.03	A	8.6	0.03

Note(s):
1. Capacity analysis based on Highway Capacity Manual methodology, using Synchro 11.

3.15.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

The Proposed Action could have short-term and long-term, direct and indirect transportation impacts.

Construction traffic associated with the cemetery development, consisting of material transport trucks, workers' personal vehicles, and construction equipment, would temporarily increase traffic volumes in the local area, but would not likely cause long delays at the Site. Thus, only minor, short-term adverse impacts would be anticipated.

During operation, public roadways in the vicinity of the Site would experience additional traffic as a result of the cemetery. The cemetery would be open to the public every day throughout the year. VA anticipates approximately 14 funeral processions per weekday at the cemetery, averaging approximately 10 vehicles per procession. The cemetery would initially experience a small number of visitors. As the cemetery is developed and utilized, the number of visitors would increase. Based on the anticipated burial and visitation rates, VA estimates that the proposed cemetery, once fully established, would generate about 170 round trip vehicle trips (340 one-way vehicle trips) per week day.

The TIA found that the intersections located near the Site currently operate at generally acceptable LOS during both the weekday AM and PM peak travel hours, although some side street approaches and movements operate at or beyond capacity. By 2027, without the proposed cemetery, delays are expected to increase due to general regional growth and the proposed Upper Petroglyphs development. As a result, the eastbound left-through movement at the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Ramps intersection would degrade to LOS F during the AM peak hour by 2027 without the cemetery. The TIA found that the proposed cemetery would generate a small number of peak hour trips (approximately 50 during AM. and PM. peaks) and would add very little peak hour traffic to area intersections. Less than 3 percent more traffic at the Atrisco Vista Boulevard/I-40 Ramps intersection would be generated by the cemetery. This intersection is currently being evaluated by the NMDOT and is expected to be signalized in the future as Upper Petroglyphs and other nearby development proceeds. With expected NMDOT improvements in place, the intersection is anticipated to operate at acceptable levels of service.

Based on the estimated burial and visitation rates, cemetery operational traffic would not produce a significant adverse impact to local traffic conditions as defined at 38 CFR 26(2)(ii). This regulation defines a significant traffic impact as "an increase in average daily traffic volume of at least 20 percent on access roads to the Site or the major roadway network."

The proposed cemetery would have periodic, short-term traffic impacts associated with funeral processions during weekday, non-peak hours. Approximately 10 vehicles are included in the average procession. Traffic impacts associated with the processions would be intermittent and of short duration.

It is anticipated that the cemetery would have notably higher than normal visitation rates during national holidays (Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Independence Day) and during special events. Traffic volumes during these days would be greater and could lead to localized traffic congestion. However, these traffic impacts would be infrequent (less than five times per year) and, consequentially, less than significant.

Less-than-significant, long-term direct impacts from cemetery operations are anticipated.

No parking impacts from the Proposed Action are anticipated. The cemetery would be designed and constructed to accommodate all cemetery parking needs on-site.

3.15.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no development by VA would occur. The Site would likely remain unimproved pastureland with no traffic or parking impacts in the short term. In the future, the Site would likely be developed by others, which could result in traffic or parking impacts, depending on the future development.

3.16 Utilities

Basic utilities (potable water, sanitary sewerage, electrical service, and natural gas) are available in the Site vicinity. Utility providers were identified as follows:

- The **Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (ABCWUA)** provides municipal water services to the Site vicinity. Drinking water in the area is a mixture of groundwater and purified surface water stored in storage tanks. A 24-inch water transmission line is located on the Double Eagle II Airport property (Aerospace Technology Park development area) and terminates at Shooting Range Access Road, just north of the Site. However, the Site is part of the Upper Petroglyphs Sector Development Plan (UPSDP), which has a development agreement with the ABCWUA that includes the installation of approximately three miles of 24-inch diameter water transmission lines along Atrisco Vista Boulevard to service the Site area. ABCWUA did not know the master developer's timeline for the extension of the water service transmission lines to the Site area. ABCWUA noted that all new infrastructure must be paid for by the developer of the property, at no cost to their current customers. No reuse water (treated wastewater effluent) service lines are currently available in the Site area.
- **ABCWUA** also provides sanitary sewer services to the Site vicinity. An 8-inch sanitary sewer line is located on the Double Eagle II Airport property (Aerospace Technology Park development area) and terminates at Shooting Range Access Road, just north of the Site. A sanitary sewer lift station is located approximately 2,000 feet north of the Site, along Atrisco Vista Boulevard. However, as part of the UPSDP development agreement with the ABCWUA, installation of approximately three miles of 12-inch diameter sewage collector lines along Atrisco Vista Boulevard is planned to provide sanitary sewer service to the Site area. ABCWUA did not know the master developer's timeline for the extension of the sanitary sewer collector lines to the Site area. ABCWUA noted that all new infrastructure must be paid for by the developer of the property, at no cost to their current customers.
- **Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM)** supplies the electrical service to the Site vicinity. A March 2017 Existing and Proposed Utilities Map for the proposed cemetery indicates that there is an existing electrical distribution line located along Atrisco Vista Boulevard that extends to the intersection of Atrisco Vista Boulevard and Shooting Range Access Road (northeast corner of the Site).
- **New Mexico Gas Company (NMGCO)** supplies the natural gas service to the Site vicinity. A NMGCO natural gas distribution line is located along the northern Site boundary, along Shooting Range Access Road.
- Various telecommunication companies provide service to the Site area. **CenturyLink/Lumen** has a fiber optic telecommunication line along Atrisco Vista Boulevard that services Double Eagle II Airport. The specific location of the fiber optic line and its southern extent were not identified.

There is no existing municipal stormwater infrastructure located at or near the Site. Based on a review of available development plans for the region, no municipal stormwater infrastructure is planned for the Site area. It is anticipated that the cemetery will be designed to manage stormwater on-site.

3.16.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

The proposed cemetery would require electricity, potable water, sanitary sewer, telecommunication, and natural gas services for the Administration and Public Information Building and cemetery maintenance building. Distribution lines for these utilities are located adjacent to or near the Site. The use of these utilities would be minor. VA would coordinate with the local utility providers during the cemetery design to determine the connection requirements. If sanitary sewer service lines have not been installed within the

Site area at the time of cemetery design and development, VA may utilize on-site septic systems for the cemetery restrooms.

The primary utility need for the proposed cemetery is irrigation water to maintain the landscaped areas of the cemetery. VA's practice is to minimize the use of irrigation water. Other than in burial areas, where turf grass may be planted, low-moisture tolerant species suited to New Mexico would be used to minimize irrigation needs, to the extent possible. During the cemetery design, VA would coordinate with ABCWUA to determine if the municipal water system has sufficient capacity to provide irrigation water for the cemetery without a substantial reduction in available water for other users. If water reuse sources are not available and the municipal water system does not have the capacity to support irrigation of the cemetery, VA would seek approval from the NMOSE to install an on-site irrigation water well. If municipal water service would accommodate the irrigation needs of the cemetery, VA would coordinate with the Upper Petroglyphs master developer and ABCWUA to determine the requirements to connect to the water service. If it is determined that VA would be required to install or fund the installation of new water transmission lines to service the cemetery, additional NEPA and NHPA analysis would be conducted prior to construction, as required.

Utility impacts would be less than significant.

3.16.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no utility impacts by VA would occur. No utility use at the Site would likely occur in the short term, as the Site would likely remain undeveloped pastureland.. The Site would likely be developed by others in the future, which could result in utility impacts, depending on the future development.

3.17 Environmental Justice

In 1994, EO 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, was issued to focus attention of federal agencies on human health and environmental conditions in minority and low-income communities and to ensure that disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on these communities are identified and addressed.

The USEPA-developed EJSCREEN (an environmental justice mapping and screening internet application) was used to obtain information regarding minority and low-income populations in the Site area. The standard one-mile radius was expanded to 2.5 miles because of the low population density in the area. The EJSCREEN report indicates the Site vicinity includes a slightly lower minority population (61 percent) than the State of New Mexico as a whole (63 percent) and a much lower low-income population (5 percent) than the State of New Mexico (39 percent).

3.17.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would not have adverse environmental justice effects. The Site is not located in an area with elevated low-income or minority populations and the Proposed Action would have only minor impacts on the residents in the area. During construction, effects on nearby residential land uses, such as through noise and dust, would be limited and controlled through BMPs described in Section 4.

3.17.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no direct environmental justice effects are anticipated. However, VA would not secure land necessary to meet its long-term cemetery needs for the region. The absence of a National Cemetery in central New Mexico after the SFNC reaches its capacity would have a

disproportionate effect on low-income Veterans and their families in the region, who are less able to afford travel to a more distant National Cemetery.

3.18 Cumulative Impacts

The CEQ Regulations define cumulative impacts as those which "result from the incremental impact of the Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions," (40 CFR 1508.7). Cumulative impact analysis captures the effects that result from the Proposed Action in combination with the effects of other actions taken before, during, or after the Proposed Action in the same geographic area.

The Site is situated in a rural area of mostly unimproved land, approximately 10 miles northwest of the center of Albuquerque. The area adjacent to the north of the Site across Shooting Range Access Road is currently unimproved desert grassland and land associated with the Double Eagle II Airport. The area adjacent to the east of the Site, across Atrisco Vista Boulevard, is currently unimproved desert grassland and scrub land. The areas adjacent to the south and west of the Site are currently unimproved desert grassland.

In 2007 and 2008, Aerospace Parkway was constructed and utility infrastructure appears to have been installed for the planned Aerospace Technology Park located in the area north of the Site across Shooting Range Access Road. The Southwest Aeronautics, Mathematics, and Science Academy charter school was constructed in the northern portion of the technology park, approximately 3,300 feet north of the Site, at that time. No other development has occurred in the technology park since 2007. No other development has occurred within one mile of the Site since the 1980s.

Amazon Fulfillment and Distribution Centers and an electrical substation were constructed approximately 2.0 to 2.5 miles south of the Site, along the west side of Atrisco Vista Boulevard, between 2020 and 2022. Additional industrial development is located along the west side of Atrisco Vista Boulevard farther south of the Site, including a Tempur Pedic mattress factory, a Shamrock Foods distribution facility, and a FedEx Freight facility, which were constructed north of the interchange of Interstate 40 and Atrisco Vista Boulevard between 2005 to 2019.

The area north of the Site, located within the City of Albuquerque, has been prepared for commercial and light industrial development (Aerospace Technology Park). No specific, firm development plans were identified for the technology park; however, it is anticipated that the park will ultimately be developed with commercial/light industrial facilities that are associated with the airport. Since the early 2000s, the City of Albuquerque has planned to expand/improve facilities at Double Eagle II Airport to supported the projected growth the region. The 2018 Airport Master Plan evaluated various expansion options and recommended the extension of the existing runways, including extending the north-south runway approximately 1,500 feet farther south, and the construction of new/improved taxiways. Recommended improvements were projected to be completed over a course of 20 years.

The Site and areas to the east, southeast, and south of the Site are located within unincorporated Bernalillo County and included within the Upper Petroglyphs Sector Development Plan, which replaced the original (1997) Westland Master Plan for the area. The 2021 Upper Petroglyphs Sector Development Plan covers approximately 4,649 acres and details the planned policies, growth, and development for the region. The development plan includes a mixed use development with residential use (1,870 acres), commercial use (150 acres), corporate/light industrial use (1,317 acres), recreational/amenities use (48 acres) and 1,264 acres of open space, parks and drainage corridors. The development is projected to occur over the course of more than 30 years. Planned development in the vicinity of the Site, shown on Figure 3-9, includes

residential uses on the eastern side of Atrisco Vista Boulevard and light industrial and neighborhood commercial uses on the western side of Atrisco Vista Boulevard, south of the Site. Phasing information in the development plan indicates the light industrial/commercial development near the Site is expected to occur after 2040 and the residential development near the Site is expected to occur after 2050.

No future development plans were identified for the unimproved, grassy pasturelands located west and southwest of the Site (unincorporated Bernalillo County). This area is not likely to be developed in the near future.

3.18.1 Effects of the Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would result in the impacts to the Site area identified in Sections 3.3 through 3.17. These include potential adverse impacts to aesthetics, air quality, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, wildlife and habitat, noise, land use, solid waste and hazardous materials, transportation, and utilities. All of these potential impacts are less than significant and would be further reduced through careful coordination and implementation of general BMPs; management, minimization, and avoidance measures; and compliance with regulatory requirements, as identified in Section 4. Given the nature of the Proposed Action and the other recent and potential future development in the area surrounding the Site, no significant cumulative adverse effects to any of these resource areas are anticipated. Other potential development in the Site area is projected to occur slowly over many years and would be subject to zoning requirements and site plan approval by Bernalillo County or the City of Albuquerque, which would serve to maintain and control regional potentially cumulative impacts.

No significant adverse cumulative impacts to the environment, induced by the Proposed Action, are anticipated within the region. Coordination between VA, federal and state agencies, NMDOT, Bernalillo County, the City of Albuquerque, ABCWUA, and community representatives would serve to manage and control cumulative effects within the region, including managing regional transportation increases and increased utility demands with adequate infrastructure. Implementation of local land use and resource management plans would serve to control the extent of environmental impacts, and continued planning would ensure future socioeconomic conditions maintain the quality of life the area's residents currently enjoy. Implementation of effective resource management plans and programs should minimize or eliminate any potential cumulative degradation of the natural ecosystem, cultural or human environment within the region of influence of the Proposed Action.

3.18.2 Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no cumulative impacts are anticipated, as the Site would likely remain unimproved land in the short term. The Site would likely be developed by others in the long term, which could result in cumulative impacts, depending on the future development.

3.19 Potential for Generating Substantial Public Controversy

As discussed in Section 4, VA has solicited input from various federal, state, and local government agencies regarding the Proposed Action. Several of these agencies have provided input; none of the input has identified opposition or controversy related to the Proposed Action. No input was received from the public in response to the scoping notice. VA published and distributed the Draft EA for a 30-day public comment period. No comments of opposition or controversy related to the Proposed Action were received.

4.0 MANAGEMENT, MINIMIZATION, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

This section summarizes the management, minimization, and avoidance measures, and mitigation measures (if necessary), that are proposed to minimize and maintain potential adverse effects of the Proposed Action at acceptable, less-than-significant levels.

Per established protocols, procedures, and requirements, VA and its contractors would implement BMPs and would satisfy all applicable regulatory requirements in association with the design, construction, and operation of the proposed National Cemetery at the Site. These "management measures" are described in this EA and are included as components of the Proposed Action. Management measures are defined as routine BMPs and/or regulatory compliance measures that are regularly implemented as part of proposed activities, as appropriate, across New Mexico. In general, implementation of such management measures would maintain impacts at acceptable levels for all resource areas analyzed. These are different from "mitigation measures," which are defined as project-specific requirements, not routinely implemented as part of development projects, necessary to reduce identified potentially significant adverse environmental impacts to less-than-significant levels.

The routine BMPs, and management, minimization, and avoidance measures summarized in Table 4-1 would be included by VA in the Proposed Action to minimize and maintain adverse effects at less-than-significant levels.

Table 4-1 Management, Minimization, and Avoidance Measures Incorporated into the Proposed Action

Technical Resource Area	Measure
Aesthetics	Develop the cemetery in concert with the Site's natural topography, preferencing low-lying design. Maintain some natural areas.
	Comply, to the extent practicable, with the development standards of the Bernalillo County Code of Ordinances (BCCO) during the cemetery design.
Air Quality	Use appropriate dust suppression methods (such as the use of water, dust palliative, covers, suspension of earth moving in high wind conditions) during onsite construction activities.
	Stabilize disturbed areas through re-vegetation or mulching if the areas would be inactive for several weeks or longer. Specific requirements would be identified with the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP).
	Implement measures to reduce diesel particulate matter emissions from construction equipment, such as reducing idling time and using newer equipment with emissions controls.
	Comply with the applicable Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Air Quality Control Board regulations, including obtaining a fugitive dust permit for construction.

Technical Resource Area	Measure
Cultural Resources and Historic Properties	Share cemetery design information with the National Park Service – Petroglyph National Monument and other interested consulting parties at the approximately 30%, 60% and 90% design stages for review and comment.
	Should potentially historic or culturally significant items be discovered during project construction, the construction contractor would immediately cease work until VA, appropriate Secretary of the Interior (SOI)-qualified professional(s), New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Indian tribes and other consulting parties are contacted to properly identify, evaluate, and appropriately treat discovered items in accordance with applicable state and federal laws (e.g., 36 CFR § 800.13).
Geology, Topography, and Soils	Control soil erosion and sedimentation impacts during construction by implementing erosion prevention measures and complying with the USEPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction Stormwater General Permit permitting process. Implement effective controls per a site-specific SWPPP. The NPDES permit would require stormwater runoff and erosion management using BMPs, such as earth berms, vegetative buffers and filter strips, and spill prevention and management techniques. The construction contractor would implement the sedimentation and erosion control measures specified in the NPDES permit and the SWPPP to protect surface water quality.
Hydrology and Water Quality	Control soil erosion and sedimentation impacts during construction by complying with the NPDES permit and the SWPPP.
	Comply with the Bernalillo County Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) requirements and Bernalillo County Stormwater Ordinances, as applicable.
	Design improvements in accordance with the requirements of Energy Independence and Security Act Section 438 with respect to stormwater runoff quantity and characteristics.
	Ensure the cemetery design includes sufficient on-site stormwater management so as not to adversely affect the water quantity/quality in receiving waters and/or offsite areas.
	Obtain a New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Ground Water Quality Bureau Underground Injection Control Class V Injection Well Permit, if applicable, based on the design of the cemetery stormwater management system.
	Use native, low-moisture tolerant species to the extent practicable to reduce the need for irrigation.

Technical Resource Area	Measure
	Obtain approval and a permit from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer (NMOSE) to install an on-site irrigation water well, if necessary.
Wildlife and Habitat	Conduct ground-disturbing construction activities associated with the cemetery development outside of the burrowing owl nesting season (April through October). If ground-disturbing activities cannot be conducted outside of the nesting season, a qualified biologist would survey the Site for active nests prior to construction in accordance with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) burrowing owl survey protocol. Contact NMDGF and/or US Fish and Wildlife Service for recommendations for species relocation or avoidance if nesting owls are identified. Active nests must not be disturbed.
	Consult with NMDGF prior to construction to develop a plan to relocate or humanely remove prairie dogs that would be impacted by ground disturbing cemetery construction activities.
	Use native species to the extent practicable when re-vegetating land disturbed by construction to avoid the potential introduction of non-native or invasive species.
Noise	Limit, to the extent possible, construction and associated heavy truck traffic to occur between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Monday through Friday, or during normal, weekday, work hours.
	Locate stationary operating equipment as far away from sensitive receptors as possible.
	Shut down noise-generating heavy equipment when it is not needed.
	Maintain equipment per manufacturer's recommendations to minimize noise generation.
	Encourage construction personnel to operate equipment in the quietest manner practicable (such as speed restrictions, retarder brake restrictions, and engine speed restrictions).
Land Use	Comply, to the extent practicable, with the development standards of the BCCO during the cemetery design.
	Coordinate with the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) during the cemetery design and construction. Submit Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration Form 7460-1 and Notice of Actual Construction or Alteration Form 7460-2 to FAA, if applicable.

Technical Resource Area	Measure
Wetlands, Floodplains, and Coastal Zone Management	None required.
Socioeconomics	Secure construction areas to prevent unauthorized access by children from nearby residential areas.
Community Services	None required.
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	Develop and implement an Educational Institutional Control to inform, educate, and protect personnel performing ground intrusive work at the Site from injury in the unlikely event of discovering a munitions and explosives of concern item.
	Comply with applicable federal and state laws governing the use, generation, storage, transportation, and disposal of solid waste and hazardous materials.
Transportation and Parking	Coordinate with the Bernalillo County Department of Public Works during the cemetery design to determine cemetery entrance locations and identify and implement any necessary roadway improvements.
	Ensure cemetery construction activities do not adversely affect traffic flow on local roadways; construction would be timed to avoid peak travel hours.
	Ensure debris and/or soil is not deposited on local roadways during the construction activities.
Utilities	Contact the local utility providers to determine the connection/extension requirements and implement the necessary requirements.
	Consult with the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority to determine if the municipal water system has sufficient capacity for cemetery irrigation.
	If it is determined that VA would be required to install or fund the installation of new water transmission lines to service the cemetery, conduct supplemental NEPA and NHPA analysis prior to construction, as required.
	Obtain approval and a permit from the NMOSE to install an on-site irrigation water well, if necessary.
	If connection to the sanitary sewer system is not feasible and an on-site septic system is necessary, obtain a NMED Environmental Health Bureau Liquid Waste Permit for the septic system(s).
	Plant low moisture tolerant species suited to central New Mexico to the extent possible to minimize irrigation needs.

Technical Resource Area	Measure
Environmental Justice	None required.

5.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

VA invites public participation in decision-making on new proposals through the NEPA process. Public participation with respect to decision-making on the Proposed Action is guided by 38 CFR Part 26, VA's regulations for implementing NEPA. Additional guidance is provided in *VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2010). Consideration of the views and information of all interested persons promotes open communication and enables better decision-making. Members of the public with a potential interest in the Proposed Action are encouraged to participate. A record of the public involvement associated with this EA is provided in Appendix F.

5.1 Scoping

VA initiated the NEPA public scoping process for the Proposed Action in November 2022, which included a public notice published in the Albuquerque Journal, a local newspaper of general circulation on November 3 and 6, 2022. No public comments or input were received in response to the scoping notice.

5.2 Public Review

VA published and distributed the Draft EA for a 30-day public comment period, as announced by a Notice of Availability (NOA) published in the Albuquerque Journal on December 28, 2022 and January 8, 2023. A copy of the Draft EA was made available for public review at the Central and Unser Library located at 8081 Central Avenue in Albuquerque and on the VA Office of Construction and Facilities Management Environmental Program website: (https://www.cfm.va.gov/environmental/index.asp). VA also emailed notification of the Draft EA for review and comment, with a link to the Draft EA on VA's website, to each of the government agencies and Tribes that were contacted during the NEPA scoping and Section 106 consultation. ABCWUA provided comments on the Draft EA (Appendix F). These comments were considered in preparing the Final EA, as appropriate, and are summarized below. No other agency, Indian tribe, or public comments on the Draft EA were received by VA.

- ABCWUA indicated they have an approved development agreement that governs provision of water and sewer services to development in the Upper Petroglyphs area that includes the Site. ABCWUA noted that potable water and sanitary sewer services are not available in the Site area at this time. ABCWUA stated that extension of services to the Site would require construction of master planned infrastructure in accordance with the approved Upper Petroglyphs planning documents. Extension of water and sewer services would require the installation of approximately three miles of 24-inch diameter water transmission lines and approximately three miles of 12-inch sewage collector lines to the Site area. Although these lines are planned to be constructed along Atrisco Boulevard to service the Upper Petroglyphs development, ABCWUA did know the master developer's timeline for the expansion of infrastructure to this area. ABCWUA noted that all infrastructure must be paid for by the developer of the property, at no cost to their current customers. ABCWUA indicated that in order to support conservation of resources, this type of facility should be constructed in an area where reuse water (treated wastewater effluent) is available to irrigate the green spaces. ABCWUA indicated reuse water service is not currently available or planned for the Site area. The availability of reuse water service to the Site area would be dependent upon the planned construction of a new reuse facility in western Albuquerque and the extension of reuse water pipes to the Site area.

6.0 AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED

6.1 Agency Coordination

Agencies consulted for this EA include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. National Park Service (Petroglyph National Monument)
- U.S. Federal Aviation Administration
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service
- New Mexico Environment Department (various bureaus)
- New Mexico Department of Transportation
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
- New Mexico Office of the State Engineer
- Bernalillo County (various departments)
- City of Albuquerque (various departments)
- Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority
- Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority
- Double Eagle II Airport

VA originally initiated the agency scoping process for the Proposed Action in August and September 2017, which included mailing the agencies scoping letters with a request for information and comment for the two sites considered at that time, the current Site and a property in Rio Rancho. VA received responses regarding the Site from the following agencies in 2017: USACE, NPS – Petroglyph National Monument, NRCS, NMDGF, NMDOT, Bernalillo County – Natural Resource Services, and the City of Albuquerque Aviation Department. In November 2022, VA re-initiated the agency scoping process for the Proposed Action, which included emailing the agencies new scoping letters for the Proposed Action at the Site. Only the NMED responded to the November 2022 scoping request. Input provided by these agencies in 2017 and 2022 is addressed in the appropriate resource sub-sections of Section 3. Written correspondence from the agencies is provided in Appendix B. The following summarizes that input, which VA used to focus this EA's analysis:

- In September 2017, **USACE** stated that the northerly adjoining property across Shooting Range Access Road contained Munition Response Sites and is a Formerly Used Defense Site. This area is the Former Kirtland Air Force Base Precision Bombing Range and contained World War II era bombing targets. The USACE stated that live and inert practice bombs have subsequently been found at this adjoining property and that live or inert ordnance may also be located at the Site due to its proximity to the bombing targets. Mapping provided by USACE indicates that the nearest bombing targets were located approximately one mile northwest and one mile northeast of the Site. USACE recommended third party unexploded ordnance (UXO) support be included in any future ground-disturbing activities at the Site. In November and December 2017, 3 in 1 completed a MEC investigation of the Site for VA. No UXO was identified at the Site. 3 in 1 reported that the nearest live bombing target was located approximately 2.9 miles north of the Site. Although the there is no evidence of historical munitions usage at the Site, 3 in 1 recommended VA implement an EIC to inform, educate, and protect all personnel performing intrusive work at the Site from injury in the unlikely event of discovering a MEC (UXO) item. See Section 3.14 for additional information.

The USACE stated that they do not have regulatory authority jurisdiction under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act or under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act at the Site (i.e., there are no USACE jurisdictional wetlands or WOTUS at the Site).

The USACE also stated that in 1976, the Site was inventoried for archaeological resources and none were identified. The USACE stated that they were not aware of any wildlife issues at the Site, but recommended VA perform surveys for Migratory Bird Treaty Act species with emphasis on grassland birds. MBTA information is discussed in Section 3.8.

- In September 2017, **NPS– Petroglyph National Monument** expressed interest in the project and stated that the Site is due west of Petroglyph National Monument. NPS provided a copy of The Petroglyph National Monument Ethnographic Landscape Report (ELR), prepared by Rio Grande Foundation for Communities and Cultural Landscapes, dated May 10, 2002. The ELR was reviewed as part of the Cultural Resources and Historic Properties evaluation of the Site (Section 3.5).
- In September 2017, **NRCS** stated that the Proposed Action would not cause prime or unique farmlands to be converted to non-agricultural use and is not subject to the Farmland Protection Policy Act.
- In September 2017, **NMDGF** noted that the Site includes habitat (undeveloped grassland or rangeland) that is known to support burrowing owls in Bernalillo County and burrowing owls could occur at the Site. NMDGF stated burrowing owls are protected under the MBTA and State of New Mexico statutes and noted that construction activities near nesting owls can lead to abandonment of eggs or nestlings and can result in the death of owls NMDGF requested that, prior to construction, the Site be surveyed for burrowing owls during the owl nesting season (April 1 through July 31). Should owls be found occupying the Site, NMDGF recommended implementing construction activities outside of the periods when owls would be present in their breeding areas, which could extend as late as October. In October 2022, a biological survey was conducted that identified suitable burrowing owl habitat at the Site and one western burrowing owl. See Section 3.8 for details.
- In August 2017, **NMDOT** stated that the Site is not located on an NMDOT right-of-way and; therefore, no further coordination with NMDOT is required.
- In September 2017, **Bernalillo County – Natural Resource Services (BCNRS)** provided the following information and/or recommendations:
    - BCNRS recommended contacting Mid-Region Council of Governments for traffic and socioeconomic information, the City of Albuquerque Aviation Department regarding Double Eagle II Airport, and NPS-Petroglyph National Monument regarding the Proposed Action.
    - Soils in the vicinity of the are identified as aeolian sand dune deposits which are susceptible to wind erosion if disturbed and recommended a low impact approach to development.
    - An active shooting range and training facility is located approximately two miles northwest of the Site which may create some noise concerns at the Site.
    - Groundwater in the vicinity of the Site is likely several hundred feet below ground surface. Water for irrigation may be available from the ABCWUA; however, if well irrigation is required, a water rights acquisition will need to be obtained from the NMOSE.
    - Shooting Range Access Road, located along the northern boundary of the Site, is used by ABCWUA to transport wastewater treatment sludge to their land treatment facility located approximately two miles northwest of the Site.
    - The Site may not be currently zoned for use as a cemetery, and as such, may require further zoning/special use coordination with Bernalillo County Planning and Development Services.

- In September 2017, the **City of Albuquerque Aviation Department (AAD)** provided the following information and/or recommendations:
    - The north/south runway at Double Eagle II Airport is proposed to be extended to the south, which may create future issues with the runway protection zone near the Site.
    - Noise from aircraft will occur at the Site.
    - AAD recommended contacting the NPS and ABCWUA regarding the Proposed Action.
    - The FAA did not have any comments regarding the Proposed Action since the Site is not located on airport property.
    - An UXO was previously identified north of the runway system at Double Eagle II Airport and was neutralized. UXOs were not encountered during construction activities in the southern portion of the airport property in approximately 2006 and 2009.
- In December 2022, **NMED** provided comments and recommendations for VA's NEPA analysis, as summarized below:
    - *Drinking Water*: NMED indicated the project is unlikely to have a significant impact on any regulated public water system as there are no public groundwater system wells or regulated public surface water system intakes within 10 miles of the Site. NMED noted if the proposed cemetery includes public drinking water infrastructure, it may require approval from or written notice to NMED Drinking Water Bureau.
    - *Groundwater*: NMED indicated State of New Mexico Ground and Surface Water Protection regulations (NMAC 20.6.2.1201) include requirements for filing a Notice of Intent to Discharge to either the NMED Ground Water Quality Bureau for discharges that may affect groundwater or the NMED Surface Water Quality Bureau for discharges that may affect surface water. NMED noted that on-site wastewater systems with design flows of more than 5,000 gallons per day must be constructed and operated in accordance with Ground Water Discharge Permits approved by NMED Ground Water Quality Bureau. If domestic wastewater is to be delivered offsite to an existing municipal or regional wastewater treatment system, an additional permit would not be required by NMED.
    - *Petroleum Storage Tank*: NMED indicated there are no registered active petroleum storage tank facilities and no confirmed petroleum storage tank releases (leaks or spills) within one-half mile of the Site.
    - *Surface Water Quality*: NMED indicated stormwater should be managed using BMPs and encouraged the use of green infrastructure and low impact designs. NMED stated USEPA may require NPDES Construction General Permit (CGP) coverage for construction activities that disturb one or more acres of land and provided information regarding the CGP requirements to minimize pollutants in stormwater runoff from entering the Rio Grande or other WOTUS. NMED indicated the Site is located in the Middle Rio-Grande Watershed (MS4 Permit NMR04A00) and the Proposed Action would be required to comply with the MS4 permit requirements and stormwater management practices of the permitted entities, including the City of Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, and Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority. NMED also stated construction activities or disturbances requiring discharge of dredge/fill material and activities that take place in riverbanks or wetlands would require a Section 404 dredge and fill permit from USACE and Section 401 water quality certification from NMED.

6.2 National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation

In October 2017, VA began NHPA Section 106 consultation with the NM SHPO and federally recognized Indian tribes for the proposed acquisition of one of two properties, the current Site and a property in Rio Rancho, for the development of the proposed National Cemetery. In a November 2017 response, the NM SHPO stated that an archaeological survey was conducted at the Site over 20 years ago and did not cover the entire Site area. The NM SHPO recommended that a professional archaeologist conduct an intensive pedestrian survey of the Site to document any archaeological sites or other historic properties that may be present. In November 2017, three Tribes responded (Pueblo of Tesuque, Pueblo of Santa Ana, and Pueblo of Sandia); all expressed interest in archaeological resources and/or requested an archaeological survey of the Site. The requested archaeological survey was completed in February 2018; no archaeological sites eligible for inclusion in the NRHP were identified (see Section 3.5).

In November 2022, VA initiated NHPA Section 106 consultation with the NM SHPO, City of Albuquerque's Open Space Division, NPS-Petroglyph National Monument, Albuquerque Historical Society, Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico, Historic ABQ (Historic Albuquerque, Inc.), Historical Society of New Mexico, National Hispanic Cultural Center, and 28 federally-recognized Indian tribes with geographic or cultural affiliation with the Site area. The Section 106 consultation letters included a description of VA's proposed undertaking (Proposed Action), definition of the area of potential effects (APE), identification of historic properties (the results of the 2022 ICRIP and 2018 Cultural Resources Survey), and VA's finding of effects on historic properties (i.e., no historic properties affected).

In a letter dated December 6, 2022, the NM SHPO concurred that there are no historic properties within the Site area. NM SHPO stated that Petroglyph National Monument is located within the visual effects APE; however, in their view, the undertaking would have no adverse effect on historic properties because the proposed cemetery will comprise a low-lying, landscaped area with few buildings. VA responded to the NM SHPO in a letter dated January 17, 2023 that was signed and sent January 19, 2023. VA agreed to expand the visual APE to include Petroglyph National Monument and accordingly changed the finding of effect from "no historic properties affected" to "no adverse effect" to historic properties.

On December 7, 2022, the Pueblo of Tesuque expressed an interest in consulting on the undertaking, but offered no comments.

In a letter dated December 14, 2022, NPS-Petroglyph National Monument recommended extending the visual effects APE to include Petroglyph National Monument, recommended cemetery design that would reduce or eliminate visual impacts to the Monument, and suggested a "water-wise" design that incorporated low water and native vegetation. As part of the cemetery design evaluation, NPS requested visual simulations of views for each design alternative from key locations within the Monument. NPS also requested to be involved in the cemetery design. In addition, NPS requested to review the information provided by VA to the Tribes as part of the Section 106 consultation, including the 2018 Cultural Resources Survey, and any responses VA received from the Tribes. NPS also noted that the Section 106 consultation information provided by VA referenced an early to mid-twentieth century road alignment that crossed the Site that was documented during the 2018 Cultural Resources Survey. NPS noted that they have a draft Cultural Landscape Inventory for historic roads and trails in the area and recommended additional investigation of the former route that crossed the Site. However, NPS had not yet reviewed the 2018 Cultural Resources Survey, which recommends the former route as not eligible for listing in the NRHP.

VA responded to NPS in a letter dated January 17, 2023 that was signed and sent January 19, 2023. In the letter, VA agreed to extend the visual effects APE to include the Monument and shared (and stated their concurrence with) the NM SHPO response that indicated the undertaking would have no adverse effect on historic properties because the design of the cemetery is anticipated to be a low-lying (no elements over two stories), landscaped area with few buildings. VA acknowledged NPS' request for a "water-wise" design and indicated that it would be considered. VA also indicated that they plan to share cemetery design

information with NPS and other interested consulting parties at the approximately 30%, 60% and 90% design stages for review and comment. As requested, VA also provided NPS the information sent to the Indian tribes, including the 2018 Cultural Resources Survey, and a summary of the all of the Section 106 consultation responses received. VA noted that the NM SHPO had concurred on VA's determination that the linear resource/former route identified at the Site in the 2018 Cultural Resources Survey is not eligible for listing on the NRHP and VA does not intend to conduct additional archaeological investigations. VA will continue to correspond with NPS.

Historic Albuquerque, Inc. offered design assistance in the future, if needed, but did not request to participate in the Section 106 consultation. No other agencies or Indian tribes have responded or elected to participate in the Section 106 consultation process.

Written Section 106 correspondence with NM SHPO, NPS and other consulting parties is provided in Appendix C.

6.3 Native American Consultation

In October 2017, VA began consultation with 24 federally recognized Tribes for the proposed acquisition of one of two properties, the current Site and a property in Rio Rancho, for the development of the proposed National Cemetery. Three Tribes responded (Pueblo of Tesuque, Pueblo of Santa Ana, and Pueblo of Sandia) in November 2017:

- The Pueblo of Tesuque requested to be informed of any additional archaeological resources discovered at the Site and requested a copy of the CRS Report.
- The Pueblo of Santa Ana recommended an archaeological survey be performed at the Site.
- The Pueblo of Sandia stated that the Site is located in close proximity to pueblo lands, cultural sites, and historical properties. The Pueblo of Sandia requested to be a participant in the Section 106 consultation to help ensure the project does not impact archaeological, sacred, or burial sites in the area.

In November 2022, VA initiated consultation with 28 federally-recognized Native American Tribes as part of this NEPA process, in accordance with 36 CFR 800.2 and Executive Order 13175, *Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments*. These Tribes, identified as having possible geographic or cultural affiliation with the Site area, were invited by VA to participate in the Section 106 process. The 28 Tribes consulted, including the 24 contacted in 2017 and 4 additional identified later, included:

- Apache Tribe of Oklahoma
- Comanche Nation, Oklahoma
- Navajo Nation, Arizona, New Mexico & Utah
- Pueblo of Isleta, New Mexico
- Pueblo of Laguna, New Mexico
- Pueblo of Sandia, New Mexico
- Hopi Tribe of Arizona
- Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan) Pueblo
- Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
- Pueblo of Taos
- Pueblo of Picuris
- Pueblo of Santa Clara
- Jicarilla Apache Nation
- Pueblo of San Ildefonso

- Pueblo of Nambe
- Pueblo of Pojoaque
- Pueblo of Tesuque
- Pueblo of Cochiti
- Pueblo of San Felipe
- Pueblo of Santa Ana
- Pueblo of Zia
- Pueblo of Jemez
- Pueblo of Acoma
- Zuni Pueblo
- Mescalero Apache Tribe
- Fort Sill Apache Tribe
- Pueblo of Santo Domingo
- Ute Mountain Tribe of the Ute Mountain Reservation

On December 7, 2022, the Pueblo of Tesuque expressed an interest in consulting on the undertaking, but offered no comments.

No other Tribes responded or elected to participate in the Section 106 consultation process. Written Section 106 correspondence with Tribes is provided in Appendix C.

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Double Eagle II Airport website, https://www.abqsunport.com/double-eagle-ii-airport/

New Mexico Environmental Department: https://www.env.nm.gov

New Mexico Department of Transportation: https://www.dot.nm.gov

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish: https://www.wildlife.state.nm.us

New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department: https://www.emnrd.nm.gov

Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority: https://www.amafca.org

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: https://www.usace.army.mil

National Wetlands Inventory: https://fwsprimary.wim.usgs.gov/wetlands/apps/wetlands-mapper/

FEMA Flood Hazard Insurance Map: https://msc.fema.gov/portal

US Bureau of Census (2010 and 2020 US Census Data): http://www.census.gov

USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey: https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: https://www.epa.gov

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: https://www.fws.gov

U.S. Geological Survey: https://www.usgs.gov

U.S. National Park Service: https://www.nps.gov

Various mapping tools: https://www.google.com/maps, https://earth.google.com, etc.

9.0 GLOSSARY

100-Year Flood – A flood event of such magnitude that it occurs, on average, every 100 years; this equates to a one percent chance of it occurring in a given year.

Aesthetics – Pertaining to the quality of human perception of natural beauty.

Ambient - The environment as it exists around people, plants, and structures.

Ambient Air Quality Standards - Those standards established under the Clean Air Act to protect health and welfare.

Aquifer - An underground geological formation containing usable amounts of groundwater which can supply wells and springs.

Asbestos - Incombustible, chemical-resistant, fibrous mineral forms of impure magnesium silicate used for fireproofing, electrical insulation, building materials, brake linings, and chemical filters. Asbestos is a carcinogenic substance.

Attainment Area - Region that meets the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for a criteria pollutant under the Clean Air Act.

Bedrock - The solid rock that underlies all soil, sand, clay, gravel and loose material on the earth's surface.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) - Methods, measures, or practices to prevent or reduce the contributions of pollutants to U.S. waters. Best management practices may be imposed in addition to, or in the absence of, effluent limitations, standards, or prohibitions (AR 200-1).

Commercial land use – Land use that includes private and public businesses (retail, wholesale, etc.), institutions (schools, churches, etc.), health services (hospitals, clinics, etc.), and military buildings and installations.

Contaminants - Any physical, chemical, biological, or radiological substances that have an adverse effect on air, water, or soil.

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) - An Executive Office of the President composed of three members appointed by the President, subject to approval by the Senate. Each member shall be exceptionally qualified to analyze and interpret environmental trends, and to appraise programs and activities of the federal government. Members are to be conscious of and responsive to the scientific, economic, social, aesthetic, and cultural needs of the Nation; and to formulate and recommend national policies to promote the improvement of the quality of the environment.

Criteria Pollutants - The Clean Air Act of 1970 required the USEPA to set air quality standards for common and widespread pollutants in order to protect human health and welfare. There are six "criteria pollutants": ozone (O_3), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO_2), lead (Pb), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), and particulate matter.

Cultural Resources - The physical evidence of our Nation's heritage. Included are: archaeological sites; historic buildings, structures, objects, and districts; and localities with social significance to the human community.

Cumulative Impact - The impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time (40 CFR 1508.7).

Decibel (dB) - A unit of measurement of sound pressure level.

Direct Impact - A direct impact is caused by a Proposed Action and occurs at the same time and place.

Emission - A release of a pollutant.

Endangered Species - Any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Environmental Assessment (EA) - An EA is a publication that provides sufficient evidence and analyses to show whether a proposed system will adversely affect the environment or be environmentally controversial.

Erosion - The wearing away of the land surface by detachment and movement of soil and rock fragments through the action of moving water and other geological agents.

Agricultural land - Cropland, pastures, meadows, and planted woodland.

Fauna - Animal life, especially the animal characteristics of a region, period, or special environment.

Flora - Vegetation; plant life characteristic of a region, period, or special environment.

Floodplain - The relatively flat area or lowlands adjoining a river, stream, ocean, lake, or other body of water that is susceptible to being inundated by floodwaters.

Fugitive Dust - Particles light enough to be suspended in air, but not captured by a filtering system. For this document, this refers to particles put in the air by moving vehicles and air movement over disturbed soils at construction sites.

Geology - Science which deals with the physical history of the earth, the rocks of which it is composed, and physical changes in the earth.

Groundwater - Water found below the ground surface. Groundwater may be geologic in origin and as pristine as it was when it was entrapped by the surrounding rock or it may be subject to daily or seasonal effects depending on the local hydrologic cycle. Groundwater may be pumped from wells and used for drinking water, irrigation, and other purposes. It is recharged by precipitation or irrigation water soaking into the ground. Thus, any contaminant in precipitation or irrigation water may be carried into groundwater.

Hazardous Substance - Hazardous materials are defined within several laws and regulations to have certain meanings. For this document, a hazardous material is any one of the following:

Any substance designated pursuant to section 311 (b)(2)(A) of the Clean Water Act.

Any element, compound, mixture, solution, or substance designated pursuant to Section 102 of Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA).

Any hazardous substance as defined under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA).

Any toxic pollutant listed under TSCA.

Any hazardous air pollutant listed under Section 112 of the Clean Air Act.

Any imminently hazardous chemical substance or mixture with respect to which the EPA Administrator has taken action pursuant to Subsection 7 of TSCA.

The term does not include: 1) Petroleum, including crude oil or any thereof, which is not otherwise specifically listed or designated as a hazardous substance in a above. 2) Natural gas, natural gas liquids, liquefied natural gas, or synthetic gas usable for fuel (or mixtures of natural gas and such synthetic gas). A list of hazardous substances is found in 40 CFR 302.4.

Hazardous Waste - A solid waste which, when improperly treated, stored, transported, or disposed of, poses a substantial hazard to human health or the environment. Hazardous wastes are identified in 40 CFR

261.3 or applicable foreign law, rule, or regulation.

Hazardous Waste Storage - As defined in 40 CFR 260.10, ". . . the holding of hazardous waste for a temporary period, at the end of which the hazardous waste is treated, disposed of, or stored elsewhere".

Hydric Soil - A soil that is saturated, flooded, or ponded long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic (oxygen-lacking) conditions that favor the growth and regeneration of hydrophytic vegetation. A wetland indicator.

Indirect Impact - An indirect impact is caused by a Proposed Action that occurs later in time or farther removed in distance but is still reasonably foreseeable. Indirect impacts may include induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate, and related effects on air, water, and other natural and social systems. For example, referring to the possible direct impacts described above, the clearing of trees for new development may have an indirect impact on area wildlife by decreasing available habitat.

Industrial Land Use – Land uses of a relatively higher intensity that are generally not compatible with residential development. Examples include light and heavy manufacturing, mining, and chemical refining.

Isolated Wetland – Areas that meet the wetland hydrology, vegetation, and hydric soil characteristics, but do not have a direct connection to the Waters of the U.S.

Jurisdictional Wetland – Areas that meet the wetland hydrology, vegetation, and hydric soil characteristics, and have a direct connection to the Waters of the U.S. These wetlands are regulated by the USACE.

Listed Species - Any plant or animal designated by a state or the federal government as threatened, endangered, special concern, or candidate species.

Mitigation - Measures taken to reduce adverse impacts on the environment.

Mobile Sources - Vehicles, aircraft, watercraft, construction equipment, and other equipment that use internal combustion engines for energy sources.

Monitoring - A process of inspecting and recording the progress of mitigation measures implemented.

National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) - Nationwide standards set up by the USEPA for widespread air pollutants, as required by Section 109 of the Clean Air Act. Currently, six pollutants are regulated by primary and secondary NAAQS: carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - U.S. statute that requires all federal agencies to consider the potential effects of major federal actions on the human and natural environment.

Non-attainment Area - An area that has been designated by the EPA or the appropriate State air quality agency as exceeding one or more national or state ambient air quality standards.

Parcel - A plot of land, usually a division of a larger area.

Particulates or Particulate Matter - Fine liquid or solid particles such as dust, smoke, mist, fumes, or smog found in air.

Physiographic Region - A portion of the Earth's surface with a basically common topography and common morphology.

Pollutant - A substance introduced into the environment that adversely affects the usefulness of a resource.

Potable Water - Water which is suitable for drinking.

Prime Agricultural land - A special category of highly productive cropland that is recognized and described by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service and receives

special protection under the Surface Mining Law.

Remediation - A long-term action that reduces or eliminates a threat to the environment.

Riparian Areas - Areas adjacent to rivers and streams that have a high density, diversity, and productivity of plant and animal species relative to nearby uplands.

Sensitive Receptors - Include, but are not limited to, asthmatics, children, and the elderly, as well as specific facilities, such as long-term health care facilities, rehabilitation centers, convalescent centers, retirement homes, residences, schools, playgrounds, and childcare centers.

Significant Impact - According to 40 CFR 1508.27, "significance" as used in NEPA requires consideration of both context and intensity.

Context. The significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the Proposed Action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action.

Soil - The mixture of altered mineral and organic material at the earth's surface that supports plant life.

Solid Waste - Any discarded material that is not excluded by section 261.4(a) or that is not excluded by variance granted under sections 260.30 and 260.31.

Threatened species - Any species that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Topography - The relief features or surface configuration of an area.

Toxic Substance - A harmful substance which includes elements, compounds, mixtures, and materials of complex composition.

Waters of the United States - Include the following: Territorial seas and traditional navigable waters; perennial and intermittent tributaries that contribute surface water flow to such waters; certain lakes, ponds, and impoundments of jurisdictional waters; and wetlands adjacent to other jurisdictional waters.

Watershed - The region draining into a particular stream, river, or entire river system.

Wetlands - Areas that are regularly saturated by surface or groundwater and, thus, are characterized by a prevalence of vegetation that is adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Examples include swamps, bogs, fens, marshes, and estuaries.

Wildlife Habitat - Set of living communities in which a wildlife population lives.