FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
PROPOSED EXPANSION AND CONSTRUCTION OF PHASE IV OF THE DALLAS FORT WORTH NATIONAL CEMETERY
DALLAS, DALLAS COUNTY, TEXAS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) prepared a Site-specific Environmental Assessment (EA) of the potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts that may result from proposed Phase IV, Major Construction, expansion and subsequent operation in the Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) National Cemetery in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas. The EA was prepared 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] Parts 1500-1508), and VA's NEPA implementing regulations, 38 CFR Part 26 (Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions).

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to support burial requests for eligible individuals and provide sufficient onsite parking to support the needs of Veterans, family members, and staff at the DFW National Cemetery.

The Proposed Action is needed to provide accessible interment services to Veterans and their families. The existing infrastructure, crypts, and columbarium cannot support burial requests for eligible individuals as well as provide sufficient onsite parking to support the needs of Veterans, family members, and staff. As of today, projections anticipate that crypts will not be available by 2023 and columbarium will reach capacity by 2030.

Background

The DFW National Cemetery opened on 12 May 2000. The cemetery is 638.5 acres and includes areas for cremated remains and casketed burial sites. The development of the cemetery grounds has been conducted in phases, to date three phases have been completed. The first phase was completed when the cemetery opened in 12 May 2000. Phase I included the development of 110 acres including traditional 12,000 gravesites and 2,220 columbarium/garden niches (for cremated remains). Phase II was completed by 2014 and included developing 53 acres and constructed 20,500 casketed burial sites and 4,000 columbarium niches. Phase III began in May 2016 and was completed in 2018. To date, the cemetery has 85,778 casketed burial sites and 31,918 columbarium niches. Phase III was anticipated to provide an additional five years capacity at the cemetery.

The proposed development of Phase IV, Major Construction, of the National Cemetery would continue to increase access to burial options to the currently unserved Veteran population living in northcentral

Texas; in 2019 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated over 337,943 Veterans live in Dallas County and the six surrounding counties. Additionally, no other National Cemeteries are within 120 miles of Dallas, Texas. Accordingly, the Proposed Action would continue to balance the currently unequal geographic distribution of National Cemeteries in the region.

1. Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the VA would construct additional burial sites and columbaria, associated roadways, expand and construct maintenance and administrative structures, construct a storage yard and soil storage building, install a chain-link fence around the perimeter of the DFW National Cemetery, install groundwater well(s), and construct an irrigation pond. It is estimated that the total acreage of temporary and permanent impacts is 67 acres.

The construction of the burial sites would occur southeast of the administration building on Rio Grande Drive. The construction should include up to 19,000 sites including both burial and areas for cremated remains. Burial areas could include approximately 12,500 cemetery sites that include three-foot by eight-foot pre-placed crypts; 600 burial sites that include four-foot by eight- foot oversized crypts; and 600 five-foot by ten-foot traditional gravesites. Areas for cremated remains include approximately 4,000 four-foot by four-foot in-ground cremains sites for granite headstones (with no grade beams); and 300 five-foot by ten-foot hybrid/green natural burial sites.

Three columbaria will be constructed, housing the 4,352 columbarium niches; two would hold approximately 1,568 niches each and one will have a capacity of 1,216. The columbaria will have a similar configuration as those currently at the facility. The walls will act as retaining walls built into the slopes and be constructed of cast-in-place concrete on drilled concrete piers. The exposed faces of the walls should be covered in stone masonry similar if not identical to the existing columbarium.

Alternatives Considered

Under the No-Action Alternative, the VA would not construct additional burial sites, columbaria, roadways leading to the burial areas, parking areas, expand the existing administration building, construct an irrigation pond, and construct soil storage area. The DFW National Cemetery would only have the capacity that was provided under Phase III to provide burial sites to Veterans. Under the No-Action Alternative, the VA could not meet its mission as well as satisfy the purpose and need for the Proposed Action; however, this alternative was retained to provide a comparative baseline, against which to analyze the effects of the Proposed Action, as required under CEQ Regulations (40 CFR Part 1502.14).
The EA examined in-depth two alternatives, the Preferred Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative, defined as follows:

Preferred Action Alternative: Implement the Proposed Action by constructing and operating Phase

IV of the DFW National Cemetery.

No Action Alternative: Do not implement the Proposed Action as identified.

2. Potential Environmental Effects

As documented in the EA, VA concludes no significant adverse impacts, either individually or cumulatively, would result from implementing the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would have no or negligible adverse impacts on cultural resource. During construction and operation of the Proposed Action, less-than-significant minor or moderate adverse impacts would occur to air quality; geology, topography, and soils; hydrology and water quality, wildlife and habitat, floodplains and wetlands; and solid and hazardous materials. VA will implement routine best management practices as necessary, to minimize or avoid adverse environmental impacts and ensure these impacts are less-than-significant levels as described in the EA.

The potential environmental effects associated with implementing the Proposed Action are summarized in the following sections. The best management practices (BMP) that reduce, eliminate, or avoid these potential effects, are provided in the EA.

Aesthetics: No impact is anticipated. Buildings, roads, columbarium, and burial areas associated with Phase IV will be designed, constructed, and operated in accordance with NCA Facility Design Guide Criteria, VA Program Guide PG 18-15, H-18-8 Seismic Design Requirements, and VA Signage Design Guide Chapter 12 National Cemetery Signs, and will mirror the existing design of the DFW National Cemetery.

Noise: No impact is anticipated. The nearest noise receptor, Dallas Baptist University, is approximately 0.87 miles (4,600 feet) from the edge of Phase IV. Noise associated with the construction of the existing infrastructure, crypts, and columbarium would be short term, intermittent, and temporary. Construction activities would be limited to daytime hours eliminating potential nighttime noise effects.

Land Use*:* No impact is anticipated. The project area is designated as permitted of a cemetery or mausoleum. Since the site is zoned and permitted use is that of a cemetery, land use will not require modification/change.

Socioeconomics: Short-term positive impacts on the local economy as a result of construction activities within the area are anticipated. The temporary positive impact should be caused by incidental spending by construction workers and the purchase of construction materials. No long-term impacts are anticipated.

Community Services: No impacts to these services or to the site from these services are anticipated. Additional community services, including police, fire, and medical, are not anticipated to be needed during the construction and upon completion of the Proposed Action. The area is currently serviced by these agencies.

Transportation and Parking: Short-term impacts on roadways are anticipated during construction.

During construction, additional traffic associated with the mobilization/demobilization of equipment and labor and delivering of materials should occur. The increase in additional interment space has the potential for an increase in visitors; however, it is anticipated that the additional visitors would not congregate at one time; therefore, an increase in traffic to the point to where it is noticeable is not anticipated. No long-term impact is anticipated.

Utilities: No impacts are anticipated The DFW National Cemetery will continue operating utilizing existing utilities. The Proposed Action will require new groundwater well distribution lines; however, the new line(s), would utilize existing systems within the DFW National Cemetery.

Environmental Justice: No impacts are anticipated. The Proposed Action would occur within the boundaries of the cemetery and no low-income or minority communities located within or adjacent to the boundaries of the DFW National Cemetery will impacted.

Air Quality: Short-term adverse, direct, and minor impacts associated with the construction activities are anticipated. Construction activities would generate minor amounts of fugitive dust (PM_{10}) and gaseous emissions of CO, VOC, NO_x, SO_2, and $PM_{2.5}$ from the combustion of fuel by construction equipment and vehicles. To mitigate short-term impacts, BMPs should be implemented to reduce emissions during the construction. BMPs could include: using appropriate dust suppression methods during on-site construction activities, define and post appropriate speed to minimize dust generated by vehicles and equipment on unpaved surfaces, shut off equipment when it is not in use, stabilize previously disturbed areas with vegetation or mulching, and visually monitor all construction activities regularly and particularly during extended periods of dry weather. No long-term impacts are anticipated.

Cultural Resources: No impacts are anticipated. No cultural materials were identified; therefore, it is assumed that no archaeological sites considered eligible for NRHP inclusion or designation of a state landmark were identified present within the project area.

Geology, Topography, and Soils: Short-term, adverse, direct, and minor impacts associated with the construction are anticipated. During the construction of the facilities, roads, and pond the designated areas would be cleared, graded, and stabilized, where necessary, with compacted fill to provide foundations for construction of the structures and roads as needed. To mitigate for the clay soils the buildings and columbariums should be supported on structural slabs to avoid problems with uneven floors, floor and wall cracking, and sticking doors to name some of the problems that can develop in expansive soils. No long-term impacts are anticipated.

Hydrology and Water Quality: No short-term impact to groundwater is anticipated. Long-term, direct, and minor impacts to groundwater are anticipated during the operation of the Phase IV in association with irrigation. Based upon two years of irrigation data, it is assumed, an average of 43 million gallons of water, annually, would be required to irrigate the existing grounds (not including Phase IV), approximately 174 acres. It is assumed that the additional maintained areas should require an additional 16 million gallons of water once in full operation (Phase IV is thirty-eight percent in size of the existing maintained area). To mitigate long-term impacts, the North-Central Texas Trinity and Woodbine Aquifers Priority Groundwater Management Area will monitor the quantity of groundwater withdrawn from the

aquifer.

Short-term, adverse, direct, and minor impacts to water quality, associated with the construction, are anticipated. During construction over 40 acres of soils will be disturbed, potentially increasing the opportunity for sediment to leave the construction site and enter surface waters, increasing sediment loading and decreasing water quality. To reduce impacts, BMPs associated with the implementation of the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan will be implemented. Long-term, adverse, direct, and minor impacts to water quality, associated with the operation of the Phase IV, are anticipated. These impacts are associated within the increase in impervious surface which could generate additional surface water runoff during rain events. To reduce impacts, the increase in surface water will be maintained and managed by the implementation of a drainage system.

Wildlife and Habitat: Short-term, direct, and minor impacts are anticipated. Proposed Action would remove the existing vegetation and displace the existing wildlife within the area as well as those species that use the project intermittently or seasonally for nesting. No state or federally listed species were observed during the site visit, however, critical habitat for state listed was observed. BMPs include adding text within construction specifications to include language concerning how to avoid harming the species if encountered and to avoid unnecessary impacts to dens. Additionally, due to the vegetation present, trees and bushes, migratory birds may be present. To minimize impact to migratory birds that could be nesting in the trees and bushes, activities requiring vegetation removal or disturbance will be conducted during times outside the nesting period of March through August. No long-term impacts are anticipated.

Floodplains and Wetlands: No short-term impact to floodplains is anticipated. Long-term, direct, and minor impacts to the floodplain are anticipated during the operation of Phase IV. An increase of impervious cover associated with the additional roadways and the modifications to the topography should generate additional surface water flow into the floodplain. The additional runoff has been incorporated into the design of Phase IV decreasing impact.

No impact to wetlands are anticipated since none are present.

Solid and Hazardous Materials: Short-term, direct, adverse and minor impacts associated with the construction are anticipated. The construction activities include ground disturbance associated with the pond, gravesites, new administration facilities, and fencing. Solid wastes that would be generated may include concrete, scrap wire, and packing materials. Landfill capacity is a finite resource and therefore adding materials to the landfill represents an impact. No long-term impacts are anticipated.

Potential for Generating Substantial Public Controversy: The VA has solicited input from various federal, state, and local government agencies as well as the general public at large, concerning to the Proposed Action. None of these groups have expressed any concerns with the Proposed Action and therefore no substantial controversy is expected during construction.

3. Agency and Public Comment

The Draft EA was made available for public and agency review for a minimum of 30 days beginning 6

September 2020. A Notice of Availability was published in the Dallas Morning Newspaper on 11 September 2020 and 14 September 2020, with information on how to obtain the documents and where to send comments. Additionally, the Draft EA was made available at the Administration Building of the DFW National Cemetery and a Notice of Availability was sent to Stakeholders, to include federal, state and local agencies.

Upon completion of the 30-day public comment period, no member of the general public or agencies afforded comments on the Proposed Action.

4. Finding of No Significant Impact

In accordance with the NEPA, as amended, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and VA (38 CFR 26), VA has determined that the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action have been adequately addressed and that no significant impacts to the quality of the human health and environment would result from construction and operation of the action. Any final action by VA related to the proposed action will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant federal and state environmental laws and regulations. Because VA's actions will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human health and the environment, VA will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its potential federal action associated with this action.

For additional information, contact: Fernando Fernandez at Fernando.Fernandez@va.gov or at (202) 632-5529, or mail comments to Department of Veterans Affairs, 425 I Street Northwest, Suite 6W.317D, Washington D.C., 20420.

Sincerely,

Elton, Sara J.
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Date: 2020.11.06 08:15:17 -07'00'

Jeffrey K. Grimes
Executive Director, NCA Date

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Fernando Fernandez
Environmental Engineer, VACFM Date