FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
PROPOSED TAHOMA NATIONAL CEMETERY PHASE 3 EXPANSION
18600 SE 240TH STREET
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Introduction

A Final Environmental Assessment (EA), included herein by reference, was 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 Phase 3 expansion of Tahoma National Cemetery located at 18600 SE 240th Street in King County, Washington. The EA was prepared 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).

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to expand the Tahoma National Cemetery to continue to serve eligible Veterans and their family members in the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area for approximately 15 years after the existing burial space is fully used.

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 cemetery or VA-funded state Veterans cemetery within 75 miles of the Veteran's place of residence.

The Proposed Action is needed to ensure the burial needs of area Veterans are met once the current burial space at Tahoma National Cemetery is depleted. There are currently no other national cemeteries in the State of Washington that are open for new casket and cremains interments.

1. Description of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action

In 1991, VA prepared an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the selection and acquisition of land in the Seattle-Tacoma Washington area to develop and operate a new national cemetery. Four prospective sites were evaluated within the EIS; the Tahoma site (now Tahoma National Cemetery) was selected.

VA acquired the approximately 158-acre Tahoma National Cemetery property from the State of Washington in 1993. At that time, the property was undeveloped wooded land. The Master Plan for the cemetery was prepared in 1995 and the first phase of cemetery development was completed in 1997. Site design and an EA for Phase 2 of the cemetery development was conducted in 2011 and Phase 2 construction activities were completed in 2014. As interments at the cemetery increase and remaining burial capacity is reduced, VA is now planning to design and construct Phase 3 of the cemetery.

The Proposed Action is to complete the planned Phase 3 expansion within the existing grounds of Tahoma National Cemetery.

Alternatives Considered

VA acquired the approximately 158-acre cemetery property in 1993 and completed a Master Plan in 1995 for the phased development of the national cemetery at the property. The proposed Phase 3 expansion area is the last remaining large, undeveloped portion of the 158-acre property owned by VA and already planned for cemetery development. Consequently, no other areas at the existing 158-acre cemetery property or other sites in the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area were considered by VA for the expanded cemetery.

The EA examined in-depth two alternatives, the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action includes the Phase 3 cemetery development within the northwestern portion of the 158-acre Tahoma National Cemetery property, generally consistent with the 1995 Master Plan for the cemetery. The Phase 3 development would include a new loop drive accessed from existing cemetery roads, with eleven new interment areas totaling approximately 15 acres, interspersed with wooded and wetland areas along the drive. The cemetery expansion will be designed in concert with the existing topography, with the existing wetland areas avoided. Interment areas would include pre-placed crypt fields, traditional in-ground burial areas, a green burial area, columbarium structures, and areas for in-ground cremains. Approximately 33,000 additional interment spaces would be provided by the Phase 3 cemetery expansion. As part of the Phase 3 expansion, the existing cemetery maintenance yard and materials storage area would be relocated to the northwestern corner of the expansion area and a new, approximately 720-square-foot satellite public restroom building would be constructed in the southeastern portion of the expansion area. In addition, the Proposed Action includes the construction of an approximately 1,400-square-foot building for the cemetery honor guard, an approximately 2,900-square-foot expansion of the cemetery administration building, and renovations to the public information center, administration building, and committal shelters, within the existing developed cemetery areas.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the planned Phase 3 expansion of Tahoma National Cemetery would not occur. The northwestern portion of the 158-acre cemetery property would remain mostly undeveloped. NCA would continue to provide burial services at the cemetery until the existing capacity is reached, after which the cemetery would be maintained and open for visitors, but would be closed for new interments.

2. Environmental Analysis

Environmental Consequences

Proposed Action Alternatives

The Final EA concluded that the Proposed Action would result in 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, wetlands, 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 the Final EA.

The Proposed Action would enable VA to provide proximate national cemetery burial benefits to the regional Veteran community for approximately 15 years after the existing Tahoma National Cemetery interment space is depleted, a significant beneficial socioeconomic effect.

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 the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area would continue to use Tahoma National Cemetery until space is no longer available. Once Tahoma National Cemetery 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.

Cumulative Impacts

The Final EA also examined the potential cumulative effects of implementing each of the considered alternatives. This analysis found that the Proposed Action, with the implementation of the BMPs; management, minimization, and avoidance measures; and regulatory compliance measures specified in the Final EA, would not result in significant adverse cumulative impacts to the human environment.

Management, Minimization and Mitigation Measures

VA will include the BMPs; management, minimization and avoidance measures; and regulatory compliance measures summarized in Table 4-1 of the Final EA (attached herein as Appendix A) in the Proposed Action to minimize and maintain adverse effects at less-than-significant levels.

3. Regulations

The Proposed Action will be consistent with federal, state, and local environmental regulations, including those listed in Appendix A of the Final EA.

4. Commitment to Implementation

VA affirms its commitment to implement the BMPs; management, minimization and avoidance measures; and regulatory compliance measures identified in the Final EA and this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

5. Agency and Public Involvement

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 Seattle Times, a local newspaper of general circulation, on March 24 and 27, 2022. The Draft EA was made available for public review 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. The Washington State Department of Ecology and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife provided comments on the Draft EA. These comments were considered in preparing the Final EA, as appropriate.

6. Finding of No Significant Impact

After careful review of the Final EA, VA has concluded that the Proposed Action would not generate significant controversy or have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, provided VA implements the BMP; management, minimization and avoidance measures; and regulatory compliance measures identified in Appendix A to this FONSI. VA will implement these measures.

This analysis fulfills the requirements of the NEPA and is consistent with the VA and CEQ regulations implementing the Act. An environmental impact statement is not required.

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Mr. Bradley G. Phillips
Executive Director, NCA Pacific District
VA National Cemetery Administration

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 and features. Preserve existing wetlands and some wooded/natural areas.
	Use natural buffers and/or berms between the developed portions of the cemetery and adjacent residential properties.
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.
	Implement measures to reduce diesel particulate matter emissions from construction equipment, such as reducing idling time and using newer equipment with emissions controls.
Cultural and Historic Resources	Should potentially historic or culturally significant items be discovered during project construction, the construction contractor would immediately cease work until VA, a qualified archaeologist, WA SHPO, Tribes and other consulting parties are contacted to properly identify and appropriately treat discovered items in accordance with applicable state and federal laws.
Geology, Topography, and Soils	Control soil erosion and sedimentation impacts during construction by implementing erosion prevention measures and complying with the WSDE Water Quality Program (WQP) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting process. Implement effective controls per a site-specific Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (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.

Technical Resource Area	Measure
Hydrology and Water Quality	Utilize low impact development techniques, such as permeable pavements, to the extent practicable, during the cemetery expansion design.
	Control soil erosion and sedimentation impacts during construction by complying with the NPDES permit and the SWPPP.
	Maintain a minimum 100-foot-wide undisturbed buffer between the cemetery development and the unnamed tributary to Jenkins Creek in the northeastern portion of the Site.
	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 Phase 3 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. Design the stormwater management system in accordance with applicable regulations.
Wildlife and Habitat	Conduct vegetation clearing outside the olive-sided flycatcher, rufous hummingbird, and western screech-owl nesting season (March through August). If vegetation clearing cannot be conducted outside of the nesting season, a qualified biologist would survey the Site for active nests prior to clearing. Active nests would not be disturbed until the eggs have incubated and the young birds have fledged.
	Maintain a minimum 100-foot-wide buffer of undisturbed land between the cemetery development and the tributary to Jenkins Creek.
	Native species should be used to the extent practicable when re-vegetating land disturbed by construction to avoid the potential introduction of non-native or invasive species.

Technical Resource Area	Measure
Noise	Limit, to the extent possible, construction and associated heavy truck traffic to occur between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, or during normal, weekday, work hours.
	Comply with the King County noise regulations.
	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	None required.
Wetlands, Floodplains, and Coastal Zone Management	Ensure that the Phase 3 cemetery expansion design avoids all delineated wetland areas.
	Maintain green space buffer areas between the delineated wetlands and the development areas. Ensure all buffers are staked and protected to prevent disturbance during construction.
	Coordinate with WSDE, as necessary, to ensure the Proposed Action is consistent with the Washington's Coastal Zone Management Program.
Socioeconomics	Secure construction areas to prevent unauthorized access by children from nearby residential areas.
Community Services	None required.
Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials	Complete an asbestos survey for cemetery structures to be renovated. Remove asbestos containing materials that would be disturbed by renovation in accordance with the federal and state requirements prior to renovation.
	Comply with applicable federal and state laws governing the use, generation, storage, transportation, and disposal of solid waste and hazardous materials.

Technical Resource Area	Measure
Transportation and Parking	Ensure cemetery construction activities do not adversely affect traffic flow on local roadways; construction traffic 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 utility providers to determine the connection/extension requirements and implement the necessary requirements.
	Adhere to Washington State Department of Health guidelines for the design and installation of septic systems associated with the satellite restroom and honor guard buildings, to the extent practicable.
	Plant low moisture tolerant species suited to the region, to the extent practicable, to minimize irrigation needs.
Environmental Justice	None required.