

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
U.S DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF THE
PHASE 2 EXPANSION
MIRAMAR NATIONAL CEMETERY
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

1 Introduction

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), National Cemetery Administration (NCA), completed a Site-specific Environmental Assessment (SEA), included herein in its entirety by reference, to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the Proposed Action to implement the Phase 2 expansion as described in the 2007 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Master Plan at the Miramar National Cemetery located at 5795 Nobel Drive, San Diego, California.

The VA prepared this SEA 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 the VA's NEPA implementing regulations, 38 CFR Part 26 (Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions).

1.1 Background

The NCA is responsible for providing cemetery services for Veterans and other eligible persons pursuant to the provisions of the *National Cemeteries Act of 1973* and other statutory authority and regulations. Under this mandate, the NCA is responsible for the operation and maintenance of existing national cemeteries and the construction of new national cemeteries.

The NCA identified a need for additional burial space for San Diego area military Veterans. Prior to the establishment of the Miramar National Cemetery, Fort Rosecrans served as the only national cemetery in the region which has also been closed to casketed burials since 1966 and to burials of cremated remains since. The two other national cemeteries in southern California include: Los Angeles National Cemetery, located in western Los Angeles approximately 130 miles from San Diego, and Riverside National Cemetery, located adjacent to March Air Reserve Base approximately 90 miles from San Diego. These two cemeteries do not meet the NCA's definition of reasonable distance for burial benefits for San Diego Veterans (within 75 miles of the Veteran's place of residence).

Miramar National Cemetery contains approximately 323 acres, of which 214 acres were approved to be developed in six phases over a 30-year planning period during the 2007 EIS process. Remaining lands, primarily in biologically sensitive areas, are protected from disturbance according to agreements made with agencies during the 2007 EIS process. Phase 1 development of approximately 45 acres was completed in 2010 and consists of an administration complex, a maintenance complex, two committal service shelters, two columbaria plazas, 14 interment sections, a Prisoner of War plaza, two memorial plazas, a memorial walk and ossuary, and a flag assembly area. Phase 1 also implemented mitigation requirements as determined by the 2007 EIS for the overall cemetery build-out. These requirements included wetland restoration, vernal pool restoration, and removal of exotic invasive plant species (see Sections 1.2 and 1.3 of the SEA for additional information on the development background and regulatory history).

1.2 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to ensure there is sufficient burial capacity available at the Miramar National Cemetery to enable NCA to continue providing interment benefits to eligible Veterans and their families by further extending the longevity of the Miramar National Cemetery in the San Diego / Southern California region.

The Proposed Action is needed because the current interment capacity at the Miramar National Cemetery is limited to the Phase 1 development, and this is not large enough to allow NCA to continue meeting its goal of providing eligible Veterans and their families with reasonable access to the VA burial options in southern California over the next few decades.

2 Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the VA would implement the Phase 2 expansion as described in the SEA, extending the longevity of the Miramar National Cemetery. Phase 2 would be constructed over approximately 24 months. The Phase 2 expansion would provide new burial sections, new roadways, expansion of the irrigation system, incorporation of site drainage (including a basin), incorporation of landscaping and site furnishings following construction, connection of the existing memorial walk to the existing flag assembly area, Administration Building and parking expansion, construction of a new Honor Guard building along with a covered vehicle parking structure, and placement of additional asphalt paving between the covered structure and the existing asphalt within the existing maintenance complex parking. Phase 2 expansion also includes a deceleration lane along Nobel Drive to the cemetery entrance.

2.2 No Action Alternative

The VA evaluated a No Action Alternative as part of the SEA, as required under the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1502.14). Under the No Action Alternative, the VA would not add new burial capacity or complete infrastructure improvements described for the Phase 2. The longevity of Miramar National Cemetery would not be extended, and future generations of eligible Veterans and their families increasingly would not have long-term, reasonable access to burial benefits at a National Cemetery in the San Diego / Southern California region.

While the No Action Alternative would not satisfy the purpose of or need for action, it was retained to reflect the status quo and provide a comparative baseline against which to evaluate the effects of the Proposed Action.

3 Summary of Environmental Consequences

In assessing environmental impacts of the Proposed Action, the VA determined there would be no significant impacts – considered individually or cumulative – from the construction or operation of the Proposed Action to the environmental resources analyzed in detail in the SEA. Section 3.1 summarizes Impacts to resources based on the more detailed analysis in the SEA.

3.1 Impacts Anticipated During Construction

Construction activities associated with the Proposed Action would occur over an approximately 24-month period and include land clearing, filling, and grading to accommodate proposed Phase 2 expansion interment areas, infrastructure, and proposed projects. Where construction activities cannot entirely avoid impacting the environment, the Proposed Action incorporates Best Management Practices (BMPs) and

measures to minimize potential impacts at less-than-significant adverse levels to resources including air quality, topography and soils, wildlife and habitat, noise, hydrology and water quality, and wetlands (see FONSI Appendix A).

Air Quality. Particulate emissions during construction would generate short-term, less-than-significant, adverse impacts; this and all other criteria pollutants would be below *de minimis* thresholds.

Cultural Resources. Past surveys conducted during the 2007 EIS did not identify any cultural resources in the expansion area. The VA would implement the Inadvertent Discovery Plan should artifacts or remains be encountered during construction, following proper management procedures to ensure short-term, less-than-significant adverse impacts.

Geology, Topography, and Soils. No impacts are anticipated on geology. Grading/modifying existing slopes to meet the NCA design standards for burial areas and roadways would generate negligible long-term adverse impacts on topography. The potential for erosion from construction disturbance and the potential for accidental release of petroleum-based fluids from equipment during construction could cause short-term, less-than-significant, adverse impacts on soils. Use of BMPs during construction and adherence to stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) measures would minimize potential for impact.

Hydrology and Water Quality. Construction related ground-disturbing activities could cause minor impact to the surface water quality of Rose Creek. Adherence to conditions within an approved SWPPP to manage construction runoff would minimize potential for impact.

Land Use and Aesthetics. The presence of heavy equipment during construction could cause negligible impacts to land use and short-term, minor, adverse impact to aesthetics.

Wildlife and Habitat. The clearing of existing habitat and conversion to professionally maintained landscape would cause short- and long-term, less-than-significant, adverse impacts to wildlife due to loss of existing habitat types. Adherence to the existing Natural Resources Management Plan would avoid impacts to federally-listed species and habitat. This plan contains guidance on protecting on-site and adjacent natural and biological resources from unplanned and indirect impacts associated with the development and operation of Miramar National Cemetery. The plan also outlines specific management elements/tasks that must occur during all applicable phases of cemetery development and those related to cemetery operations, including quarterly monitoring and reporting.

Noise. Heavy machinery associated with clearing and grading during construction would generate short-term, less-than-significant, adverse impacts. Receptors would be limited to visitors within Miramar National Cemetery.

Floodplains, Wetlands and Coastal Zone Management. Development of the Phase 2 expansion is located outside of the regulated 100-year floodplain and coastal zone. Minor permanent impacts would occur to approximately 600 feet (0.07 acre) of ephemeral stream and 0.04 acre of wetland to accommodate the Phase 2 cemetery expansion. Impacts to these resources, however, have been previously mitigated through compensatory mitigation completed in 2012 which included permitted impacts to 0.477 acre of waters of the U.S.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice. Construction worker hiring and material/supply purchases from local or regional vendors would generate short-term, negligible localized beneficial impacts. No adverse impacts to environmental justice populations are anticipated.

Solid and Hazardous Materials. An increase in solid waste generation (excess construction materials that cannot be recycled) would cause short-term, less-than-significant adverse impacts.

Transportation and Parking. Increased construction traffic traveling on roads leading to and from, and within, Miramar National Cemetery would cause a short-term, less-than-significant adverse impact.

Utilities. Minor impacts to utilities would occur during construction, as the proposed Nobel Drive deacceleration lane would require relocation of existing streetlights, traffic signals, electrical transformer electrical boxes, and irrigation equipment.

3.2 Impacts During Operation

Air Quality. Extending the longevity of Miramar National Cemetery and reducing travel outside of the region for visitors would cause long-term, less-than-significant beneficial impacts to air quality. Less-than-significant adverse impacts would occur from expanded maintenance equipment emissions.

Hydrology and Water Quality. Stormwater runoff from development and operations could cause minor impacts to surface water quality of Rose Creek. Adherence to conditions within an approved stormwater management plan to manage stormwater from Phase 2 expansion development would minimize the potential for impact.

Noise. Grounds maintenance equipment in the expansion area would cause long-term, negligible adverse impacts to sensitive receptors within the cemetery.

Community Services. Extending the longevity of Miramar National Cemetery would cause a long-term, beneficial impact for Veterans and their families and visitors throughout the Southern California / San Diego region. No significant adverse impact on other community services would occur.

Solid and Hazardous Materials. Negligible impacts would occur during operation; no new types of wastes would be generated, and only minimal quantities of memorial markers (floral arrangements, sanitary waste) would be generated.

Transportation and Parking. The addition of a deacceleration lane along Nobel Drive would improve traffic flow and increase safety along Nobel Drive for funeral processions, providing a beneficial impact.

Utilities. Operation would have a long-term, negligible adverse impact on the existing irrigation water utility, due to increased utilization of reclaimed water to irrigate the new expansion area. No impact to other utilities are anticipated, as their use would not substantively increase during operation.

4 Cumulative Impacts

The impacts from the Proposed Action, when considered on a cumulative basis with impacts from past projects and probable future projects at and in vicinity of Miramar National Cemetery, remain at less-than-significant adverse levels for all the environmental resources analyzed in this SEA.

5 Impact Minimization Measures

To ensure impacts to the environment remain at less-than-significant adverse levels, the VA would implement the management, avoidance, and regulatory compliance measures identified in the SEA which are also summarized in Appendix A of this FONSI.

6 Agency and Public Involvement

The VA performed both agency and public involvement activities for development of the entire Miramar National Cemetery during the development of the 2007 EIS. As part of this SEA process, the VA coordinated with the landowner, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, along with federal permitting and approving regulatory agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [USACE]) involved in the 2007 EIS to review any differences between the current Proposed Action and the Phase 2 cemetery development concept presented in the 2007 EIS. Additionally, the VA has been actively coordinating with the City of San Diego and local utility companies regarding which easements would be affected by the Proposed Action. The VA held a 30-day public comment period on the Draft SEA from August 16th to September 15th, 2020 and placed announcements in the *San Diego Tribune*. Appendix A of the SEA contains copies of agency coordination and documentation of public involvement. The VA did not receive any comments on the Draft EA.

7 Finding of No Significant Impact

As a result of the analysis of impacts in the SEA, summarized and incorporated by reference herein, in its entirety, it is the conclusion of the VA that, with the implementation of appropriate management, avoidance, and regulatory compliance measures identified in the Final SEA and included herein as Appendix A, the Proposed Action would not generate significant public controversy and would cause no significant impact of an adverse nature on the quality of the natural or human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of NEPA. Therefore, per NEPA, the CEQ regulations, and 38 CFR Part 26, I am signing this FONSI, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Action is not required.

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Bradley Phillips
Executive Director
NCA Pacific District

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Mr. Fernando L. Fernandez, REM
Environmental Engineer
VA Construction and Facilities Management Office

Date

APPENDIX A

Best Management Practices, Environmental Avoidance and Protection Measures, and Regulatory Compliance Measures Incorporated into the Proposed Action

Air Quality and GHG
Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting the BMPs detailed in the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District's Rule 55 for control of dust from construction. • Covering open equipment when conveying or transporting material likely to prevent material from becoming airborne, • Minimizing the use and number of trips of heavy equipment. • Maintaining and tuning all engines per manufacturer specifications to perform at U.S. Environmental Protection Agency certification levels, where applicable, and to perform at verified standards applicable to retrofit technologies. • Prohibiting construction vehicles both on- and off-site from excess idling, consistent with current California Air Resources Board Regulations. • Prohibiting tampering with engines and requiring continuing adherence to manufacturer's recommendations. • Using alternative fueled vehicles and construction equipment where feasible. • Using energy efficient lighting systems, such as LED technology, where feasible. • Developing a construction traffic and parking management plan to minimize traffic interference and maintains traffic flow.
Operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None required
Geology, Topography, and Soils
Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using common dust suppression techniques, such as spraying the ground with water and revegetating disturbed areas with approved native plant species to reduce potential of wind erosion. • Using construction BMPs such as installation of sediment barriers (e.g., silt fencing, straw or hay bales and sandbags), temporary slope breakers, and mulching to reduce soil erosion from water especially wherever soil is exposed, steep slopes are present, or erosion potential is high.
Construction and Operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining equipment in good working order and equipping operators with emergency spill kits to reduce the potential for spills and quickly respond in the event of a spill.
Hydrology and Water Quality
Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adherence to conditions within an approved SWPPP to manage stormwater and runoff from earth-disturbing activities during construction and implement measures to reduce stormwater runoff. BMPs could include covering exposed soils in heavily trafficked areas; placing structural erosion

controls where necessary (e.g., silt fences or hay bales); and designating and protecting established/existing vegetation buffer areas (i.e., trees, shrubs, and natural vegetation), to the extent practicable.

- Inspection of stormwater management control devices prior to a forecasted storm, after a rain event that causes runoff from the construction site, at 24-hour intervals during extended rain events, and at any other time(s) or intervals of time specified in contract documents.
- Restoration and stabilization of temporarily disturbed areas through use of native grasses and forbs to prevent erosion and sedimentation.
- Adherence with stormwater runoff requirements under Section 438 of the Energy Independence and Security Act. Use of site planning, design, construction, and maintenance strategies for the property to maintain, to the maximum extent technically feasible, the predevelopment hydrology of the site.
- Maintaining equipment in good working order and equipping operators with emergency spill kits to reduce the potential for spills and quickly respond in the event of a spill.

Operations

- Adherence to conditions within an approved SWMP to manage the increase of impervious surface and runoff through stormwater management controls (e.g., retention ponds, swales, etc.).
- Maintaining equipment in good working order and equipping operators with emergency spill kits to reduce the potential for spills and quickly respond in the event of a spill.

Wildlife and Habitat

Construction

- Clearly delineating the limits of construction to avoid disturbance to adjacent areas.
- Providing contractor training to educate construction personnel about sensitive biological and aquatic resources (including the coastal California gnatcatcher and vernal pools).
- Clearing of suitable coastal California gnatcatcher habitat outside the breeding season (February 15 to August 31).
- Using biological monitors during vegetation clearing and grading activities within and adjacent to sensitive biological and aquatic resources.
- Scheduling construction activities and other project-related work to occur during daylight hours. Should construction lighting be required, all structures will be shielded to ensure that light will not enter plant communities recently occupied by gnatcatchers.
- Collecting vernal pool habitat components prior to any earthwork activities within pools supporting San Diego fairy shrimp.
- Clearing and grading near vernal pools/ephemeral basins when the soils are dry enough to reduce the potential for erosion.
- Adherence to an approved SWPPP and use of BMPs to reduce potential for construction runoff.
- Washing and inspecting construction equipment prior to beginning work on-site to reduce the potential introduction of invasive species to the proposed construction area.
- Adherence to the Natural Resources Management Plan provisions for prevention of colonization of invasive species disturbed by construction activities, including the removal of these species from sensitive areas and within 50 feet of the outer limit of cemetery development prior to construction.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing of vegetation outside of the migratory bird breeding season (January 15 to August 31). If clearing is required within the breeding season, the VA would perform a preconstruction nesting bird survey using a qualified biologist within suitable habitat. If active nests are observed during surveys, an appropriate buffer would be determined in coordination with USFWS and placed around the nests until the young have fledged or the nest is abandoned. • Using species and cultivars of native plants for restoring temporarily disturbed areas at the perimeter of the site and in temporary access and laydown areas that have performed well in Phase 1 to minimize irrigation and fertilization needs. This includes restoration of temporary access and laydown areas which disturb native and/or gnatcatcher habitat by using a non-irrigated seed mix and plants appropriate for the site and gnatcatcher habitat. Depending on time of year for the application, this may be supplemented with container stock or plugs utilizing gel packs in lieu of irrigation as water.
Construction and Operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent perimeter fencing installed around areas supporting protected vernal pools and ephemeral basins during Phase 1 would be maintained to protect these features during construction and operations.
Noise
Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting construction during the daytime hours to the greatest extent possible. • Using transportation routes located as far away from sensitive receivers as possible. • Operating equipment per manufacturer's recommendations and shutting down noise-generating heavy equipment when not needed. • Requiring construction personnel to operate equipment to reduce noise to the practicable (e.g., speed restrictions, retarder brake restrictions, engine speed restrictions, etc.).
Operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None required
Wetlands
Construction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly delineating the limits of construction to avoid disturbance to adjacent areas. • Providing contractor training to educate construction personnel about sensitive biological and aquatic resources. • Using biological monitors during vegetation clearing and grading activities within and adjacent to sensitive biological and aquatic resources. • Clearing and grading near vernal pools/ephemeral basins when the soils are dry enough to reduce the potential for erosion. • Adherence to an approved SWPPP and use of BMPs to reduce potential for construction runoff.
Construction and Operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent perimeter fencing installed around areas supporting protected vernal pools and ephemeral basins during Phase 1 would be maintained to protect these features during construction and operations.