

**DRAFT**  
**Environmental Assessment**  
**FEMA-1607-DR-LA**  
**Hurricane Rita**  
**William Johnston Property Emergency Temporary Housing Site**  
**Sweet Lake, Cameron Parish, Louisiana**

**A. Introduction**

On September 24, 2005, Hurricane Rita made landfall just east of Sabine Pass, Texas, near the Louisiana border. The storm was a Category 3 hurricane with sustained winds in excess of 120 mph and storm surge well above normal high tide levels.

President Bush declared a major disaster for Louisiana on September 24, 2005 due to damages from Hurricane Rita and signed a disaster declaration (FEMA-1607-DR-LA) authorizing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide federal assistance in designated areas of Louisiana. FEMA proposes to administer this federal disaster assistance per the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 USC 5121-5206, as amended (Stafford Act). Section 408 of the Stafford Act authorizes FEMA's Individual Assistance Program to provide emergency temporary housing for disaster victims whose homes are uninhabitable.

This draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508), and FEMA's regulations implementing NEPA (44 CFR 10.9). The purpose of this draft EA is to analyze potential impacts of temporary and transient emergency group housing for disaster victims as part of an expedited review process. FEMA will use the findings in this draft EA to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

**B. Purpose and Need**

Catastrophic damage from Hurricane Rita has resulted in an extraordinary demand for housing assistance in southwestern Louisiana. According to the 2000 Census, the total population for the site's zip code was approximately 22,800 people. To date, the Cameron Parish has approximately 5,100 requests for Federal assistance. Approximately 1,000 of the requests are specifically for temporary housing. The purpose of this action is to help satisfy the local housing demand.

**C. Environmental Review Process**

To meet the urgent need of temporary housing for disaster victims, FEMA has implemented an expedited environmental review process. The purpose of this document is to assist FEMA

in fulfilling its environmental review responsibilities under NEPA and serve as a vehicle to document compliance under other applicable environmental laws. Laws and Executive Orders addressed through this EA include: the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice), and Farmland Protection Policy Act. Expedited agency consultation consisted of establishing a programmatic agreement with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and an expedited review process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Other resource areas or issues evaluated in this EA include noise, visual resources, traffic, socioeconomics, safety and security, and hazardous and toxic waste.

The scope of FEMA's environmental review includes evaluating project alternatives, characterizing the affected environment, identifying potential environmental impacts, and outlining ways to reduce or minimize adverse affects. This EA examines the site-specific environmental impacts associated with building a proposed FEMA group housing park on land to be leased by the General Services Administration for this purpose.

This draft EA was prepared based on a site evaluation conducted on December 13, 2005, document research, and agency information. An electronic version of the draft EA will be provided to interested agencies prior to and during the public comment period. The public participation period will be brief, as necessitated by the emergency circumstances. Agency coordination and consultation will be deemed complete at the end of the public comment period. FEMA believes that this process allows for sufficient action analysis and meets the goal of providing timely federal assistance to disaster victims.

#### **D. Site Selection and Alternatives Analysis**

NEPA requires investigation and evaluation of reasonable project alternatives as part of the project environmental review process. Federally assisted housing options, including hotel/rental assistance and locating a travel trailer, pre-fabricated modular units or mobile home on a private site or in an existing park, are being exhausted first for those requesting housing assistance in Cameron Parish. Accordingly, a remaining alternative is to build a group housing site where the above options do not satisfy the demand. In order to expedite the site selection process, FEMA's contractors initially reviewed available aerial photos and maps, conducted site reconnaissance field surveys, and contacted state and local officials to identify potential sites. Factors considered in choosing a site include: demand for temporary housing in that area, site topography, property owner willingness, cost, past land use, currently planned for development, access to existing utilities, engineering feasibility, and environmental/cultural resource sensitivities. FEMA continues to evaluate alternative sites in Cameron Parish, and other parishes within southwest Louisiana. Although various alternatives have been and continue to be identified, the extraordinary amount of needed housing has

limited this EA to analysis of one suitable site alternative at this time. The William Johnston Property site was selected for further analysis because it meets specific site selection criteria.

### **E. Project Location**

The proposed site, known as the William Johnston Property, is located on the north side of Louisiana Highway 384 between Newell Road (PR-4104) and Alfred Duhon Road in the Sweet Lake area of southwestern Louisiana. The site is bordered by houses on the east and west, by Highway 384 on the south; and an open field on the north (Figures 1 and 2).

### **F. Site Description**

The site consists of approximately 12 acres of undeveloped land currently used for hay production. The field is flat and located in a rural residential area. It is bordered by houses on the east and west, by Highway 384 to the south and by an open field to the north. The main entrance would be located off Highway 384. Land use throughout the area is rural, agricultural in nature and sparsely populated (Figure 3).

### **G. Project Description**

The project description was based on a preliminary site design completed on December 28, 2005 (Fluor 2005). The proposed action would involve the construction of a group housing site (hereafter “the Park”) which would accommodate approximately 135 modular structures and 15 travel trailers on approximately 12 acres (Figure 4). At this time, occupancy is not expected to exceed 18 months. The Cameron Parish President, in a letter dated November 15, 2005, indicated that the Park of modular structures and travel trailers is compatible with current zoning for the property.

Based on the preliminary site design (Fluor 2005), the following features would be included with this temporary housing site:

- Site preparation to include clearing, grading, and removal of vegetation.
- Spacing between units to be approximately 20 feet on-center.
- Potable water would be connected to the local underground water main in the right-of-way located north and parallel to Highway 384. New water lines would be connected to all units.
- Electric service is available along Highway 384 and would be routed into the Park. Construction specifications state that the service company will determine whether lines will be above or below-ground.
- A gravity flow sanitary sewer system is proposed to collect and transport the park effluent to a package sanitary wastewater treatment plant at the northern end of the site. After treatment, the effluent would be discharged to a ditch about 200-feet south of the northern property boundary. The package wastewater treatment plant and the

resulting effluent would comply with all Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality standards and permits.

- Storm water drainage would be sloped to adjacent drainage ditches parallel to the eastern and western property boundaries, to provide positive drainage flowing to the north.
- On-site roads are would be surfaced with gravel at the main entrance from Highway 384.
- A safety fence would be installed and maintained around the Park perimeter.

When the temporary housing need has ended, FEMA expects that the modular units and the travel trailers would be transported from the site to suitable locations elsewhere (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). The Park would then be seeded and restored to previous conditions, to the extent practicable, and/or used by the landowner in a manner consistent with the parish zoning classification.

#### **H. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences**

Table 1 summarizes the results of the environmental review process. Potential environmental impacts that were found to be negligible are not evaluated further. Resource areas that have the potential for impacts of minor, moderate, or major intensity are further developed in Section I. Definitions of the impact intensity are described below:

**Negligible:** The resource area (e.g., geology) would not be affected, or changes would be either non-detectable or if detected, would have effects that would be slight and local. Impacts would be well below regulatory standards, as applicable.

**Minor:** Changes to the resource would be measurable, although the changes would be small and localized. Impacts would be within or below regulatory standards, as applicable. Mitigation measures would reduce any potential adverse effects.

**Moderate:** Changes to the resource would be measurable and have both localized and regional scale impacts. Impacts would be within or below regulatory standards, but historical conditions are being altered on a short-term basis. Mitigation measures would be necessary and the measures would reduce any potential adverse effects.

**Major:** Changes would be readily measurable and would have substantial consequences on a local and regional level. Impacts would exceed regulatory standards. Mitigation measures to offset the adverse effects would be required to reduce impacts, though long-term changes to the resource would be expected.

Table 1. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences Matrix

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Geology and Soils	X				Potential for localized increase in soil erosion during construction.	LAPDES stormwater construction permit to be obtained by construction contractor.	Implement construction BMPs, install silt fences/straw bales to reduce sedimentation. Area soils would be wetted during construction to minimize wind erosion. If fill is stored on site, the contractor would be required to cover it appropriately.
Hydrology and Floodplains (Executive Order 11988)	X				Project area is not located in a 100-year floodplain per the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map Zone X 225194 0125F, revised April 16, 1991. No impacts anticipated.		
Wetlands (Executive Order 11990)	X				No wetlands were observed at the project site during the site reconnaissance. The area is not mapped on USFWS National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps. No impacts anticipated.		
Coastal Zone Management	X				Project site is previously disturbed land located within the boundaries of the Coastal Zone. The project would avoid wetlands and is well above any tidal influence. Project would be compatible with the general consistency authorization agreement. Joint permit not required.	Communication with Department of Natural Resources (DNR), 10/28/05.	
Water Quality		X			Treated wastewater effluent discharged into drainage ditch on the northern side of the property. Also, potential for localized increase in sedimentation during construction. Impacts are anticipated to be minimal. See Section I.	LAPDES stormwater construction and WWTP effluent discharge permits to be obtained by construction contractor. Due to surface discharge, more stringent effluent standards may apply (LADEQ 12/12/05). LDEQ site visit required to determine final effluent standards.	Contractor to comply with LA Department of Health and Hospitals and LA Department of Environmental Quality standards and permits for effluent treatment and discharge to be determined by LDEQ site visit. Implementation of construction BMPs and installation of silt fences/straw bales to reduce sedimentation. See Section I.

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Air Quality	X				Parish is in attainment for criteria pollutants per the Clean Air Act. Negligible impact would be anticipated from vehicle exhaust emissions and increased dust during construction.	EPA Region 6 Designation.	Area soils would be covered and/or wetted during construction to minimize dust. Rock cover for roads and housing pads would be wetted and/or treated periodically with a commercially available product approved for use in residential areas to minimize dust particles.
Vegetation and Wildlife	X				Site is currently pasture and fallow field suitable for use by fringe species.		Once the temporary housing need has ended, the site would be seeded and restored to previous conditions and/or used by the landowner in a manner consistent with the county zoning.
Threatened and Endangered Species (Endangered Species Act Section 7)	X				Nine species are listed as Endangered or Threatened in Cameron Parish. However neither species nor appropriate habitat is located within the project study area. No impacts anticipated.	USFWS concurs that the proposed action will have no effect on Federal trust resources (12/12/05).  Field observation conducted on December 13, 2005 and USFWS emergency consultation provisions letter dated September 27, 2005.	
Cultural Resources (National Historic Preservation Act Section 106)		X			Based on background research and expected subsoil disturbance during placement of underground utilities, there is a reasonable potential for archeological deposits to be present. Section I.	Coordination letter to LA SHPO initiated 12/16/05	Archeological monitor to be present during subsurface excavation site work. Also see Section I.

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Socioeconomics		X			Park occupancy is expected to be about 375 people (150 units x estimated 2.5 people per unit) maximum. It is expected the Park residents are current displaced residents of Cameron Parish and no additional community services will be necessary. See Section I.	In a letter dated 11/15/05, the Parish President approved the Site for use as temporary housing.	See Section I.
Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)		X			The proposed action is not expected to pose disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. See Section I.		See Section I.
Noise	X				During the construction period, residents immediately adjacent to the project site would experience an increase in noise levels. The vehicles from Park occupants would also increase the level of vehicular noise in the area. However, this would be a temporary impact and limited to the duration of the Park's occupancy.		If necessary, the following noise reduction measures should be considered: (1) restricting the 24-hour schedule to the first two weeks of construction; (2) using a 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. construction schedule; (3) completing construction closest to adjoining residents first; and (4) completing noisier activities during the day if a 24-hour schedule is used.
Safety and Security	X				No impact anticipated.		The contractor would place fencing around the site perimeter to protect residents from trespassers. The contractor would also provide 24-hour security at the Park.  The contractor would post appropriate signage and fencing to minimize potential adverse public safety concerns. Appropriate signage and barriers should be in place prior to construction activities in order to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities and traffic pattern changes.

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Impact Summary	Agency Coordination / Permits	Mitigation
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Hazardous Materials and Toxic Wastes	X				A search of hazardous materials databases was completed on 12/15/05. The approximate 12-acre parcel identified for the Park and adjacent areas does not have any registered underground storage tanks, generators or incidents. No environmental conditions of concern were observed on site. No impacts anticipated. The FirstSearch Report is available upon request.		
Traffic and Transportation	X				Traffic volumes on Highway 384 and local roads would increase. The existing infrastructure would be able to accommodate these increases without impacting local traffic.	In a letter dated 11/15/05, the Parish approved the Site for use as temporary housing.	



## **I. Additional Impact Analysis**

### Water Quality

The proposed project site is located in the Lower Calcasieu watershed that drains into the Gulf of Mexico. The Lower Calcasieu watershed has several water bodies that exceeded the total maximum daily load (TMDL) for a number of criteria pollutants, in particular; nutrients, mercury, oil and grease, organic enrichment, and siltation. Five large quantity generators are registered in the watershed and 14 facilities are permitted to discharge to waters of the US.

An onsite wastewater package treatment plant is proposed. This system would collect and treat the wastewater to regulatory standards. The treated effluent would then be transported to the northernmost onsite ditch within the Black Bayou watershed. The package treatment plant is specified for a capacity of 28,000 gallons per day (gpd) and a maximum of 30 mg/L biological oxygen demand (BOD). Appropriate standards and permits from Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (LADHH), and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LADEQ) would be obtained prior to construction. These permits may require stricter standards than the maximum allowed. With the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and compliance with LADHH and LADEQ discharge standards and permits, potential impacts to local water resources are anticipated to be minor and temporary in nature.

### Cultural Resources (National Historic Preservation Act Section 106)

During the field visit on December 13, 2005, no evidence of archaeological significance was observed, on the ground surface, in the Area of Potential Affect (APE). A search of the Louisiana Division of Archaeology database revealed two previously recorded historic properties located within a one mile radius of the APE. These are SJB-13 (historic ruins late 19<sup>th</sup> century) and SJB-17 (historic scatter late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup>). Eligibility for the National Register of Historical Places (NRHP) is undetermined.

The proposed site lies within a natural levee area. Based on the above information, a reasonable potential exists for archaeological properties to be present within the project area. Therefore, an archeological monitor meeting Secretary of the Interior Standards in Archaeology must be present during subsurface excavations. Consultation was initiated with the State Historic Preservation Office on December 16, 2005. If cultural resources are encountered, construction in the affected area would stop until further expedited evaluation can be completed.

### Socioeconomics

The proposed project site is located in Sweet Lake, Louisiana 70607. According to the 2000 census data, the local zip, 70607, had approximately 23,000 residents, and 9,500 housing units. The median household income in 1999 was \$33,070 (based on 2000 Census). The primary employment sectors (about 75 percent of all jobs) were industry,

sales, and service industry. Approximately 13 percent of local families lived below the poverty level.

With the establishment of the Park, approximately 375 people, likely existing Cameron Parish residents, would be temporarily relocated to the project site. Because the potential Park residents would be area residents, the demand for local public and commercial services such as schools, fire and police services, child care, and medical services, is not anticipated to be greater than the pre-hurricane demand. Therefore, the impacts would be minimal. Additionally, by helping residents return to the area, the action would help the community recover. In a letter dated November 15, 2005, the Parish President indicated that the property has been approved for use as a temporary housing site.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order (EO) 12898 requires that each Federal agency identify and address the effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. The function of the EO is to avoid disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental impacts to the target populations. Further, EO 12898 also tasks Federal agencies to ensure that public notifications regarding environmental issues are concise, understandable, and readily accessible.

Within the zip code 70607, the census-designated place (CDP), the population is about 30 percent African American, and 67 percent Caucasian. Approximately 13 percent of families and 15 percent of individuals are living below the poverty level. In comparison to Cameron Parish, the CDP has a higher percentage of minority residents and families below poverty. As compared to the State as a whole, the percentage of African Americans and other minority groups are lower and the percentage of families living in poverty is lower (Table 2) (Census 2000).

Table 2: Minority and Low Income Populations Summary Statistics

<b>Subject</b>	<b>70607</b>	<b>Cameron Parish</b>	<b>Louisiana</b>
Demographics			
Caucasian	67%	94%	64%
African American	30%	4%	33%
Other (non-white)	3%	2%	3%
Families below poverty	13%	9%	15%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000

From the perspective of both prospective Park residents and residents of the adjacent community, the proposed action would not pose disproportionately high and adverse public health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. The availability of Federal assistance, including temporary housing for displaced individuals,

is consistent with EO 12898. All forms of FEMA disaster housing assistance are available to any affected household that meets the conditions of eligibility, demographics are not among the eligibility requirements.

The specific demographics of Park occupants are not available at this time, because specific individuals or families are in the process of being identified. However, the demographic makeup of the future Park residents is expected to be similar to the surrounding area as a whole. Further, the availability of temporary housing would result in a positive impact to displaced individuals, regardless of whether they are minority and/or low income.

### **J. Public Involvement**

Public involvement is being performed in compliance with NEPA, FEMA's regulations implementing NEPA at 44 CFR 10.9(c), and Executive Order 12898. A Public Notice is being published in *The American Press*, January 4 through January 6, 2006. Due to the emergency nature of this action, the public comment period will be brief – January 4 to January 6, 2005. Written comments on the Draft EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) can be faxed to FEMA's Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge at (225) 346-5848; and verbal comments will be accepted at (225) 376-5137 and TTY for hearing or speech-impaired at 800-462-7585; between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. The Draft EA and FONSI are available for public review at the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) located at the Grand Lake Community Center, 125 Recreation Lane, Grand Lake, Louisiana 70607. The DRC hours are 9:00 AM to 7:00 PM, Monday through Saturday. The draft EA and FONSI are also available for viewing and download from FEMA's website at <http://www.fema.gov/ehp/docs.shtm>.

If no substantive comments are received, the draft EA and draft FONSI will become final and this initial Public Notice will also serve as the final Public Notice. Substantive comments will be addressed as appropriate in the final documents.

## **K. References**

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). 1991. Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM). Community Panel 225194 0125F. Revised April 16, 1991.

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----- . 2005. Lake Charles SW, Louisiana Quadrangle Base Map, 7.5 Minute Series (Topographic-Bathymetric). [www.topozone.com](http://www.topozone.com). Website accessed December 14, 2005.

**L. Figures**

Figure 1: Geographic Location

Figure 2: Site Location

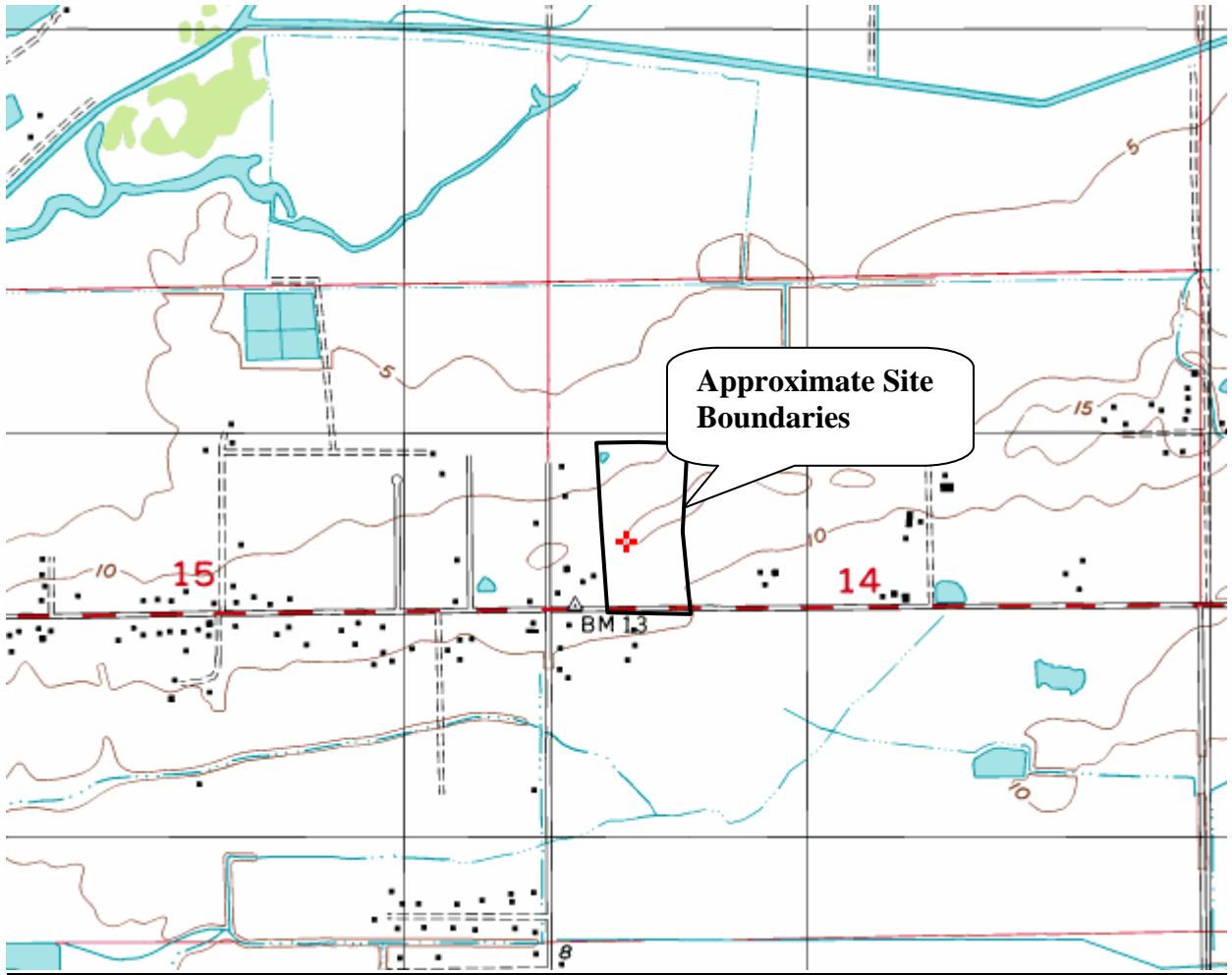
Figure 3: Photographs

Figure 4: Preliminary Site Design

**Figure 1:** Geographic Location of William Johnston Temporary Housing Site, Sweet Lake, Cameron Parish, Louisiana.



**Figure 2.** Site Location, William Johnston Property Temporary Housing Site, Sweet Lake, Cameron Parish, Louisiana, USGS topographic map Lake Charles SW. Scale approximately 1"=2000'.



**Figure 3.** Photographs of Property.



Project area facing north from Highway 384.



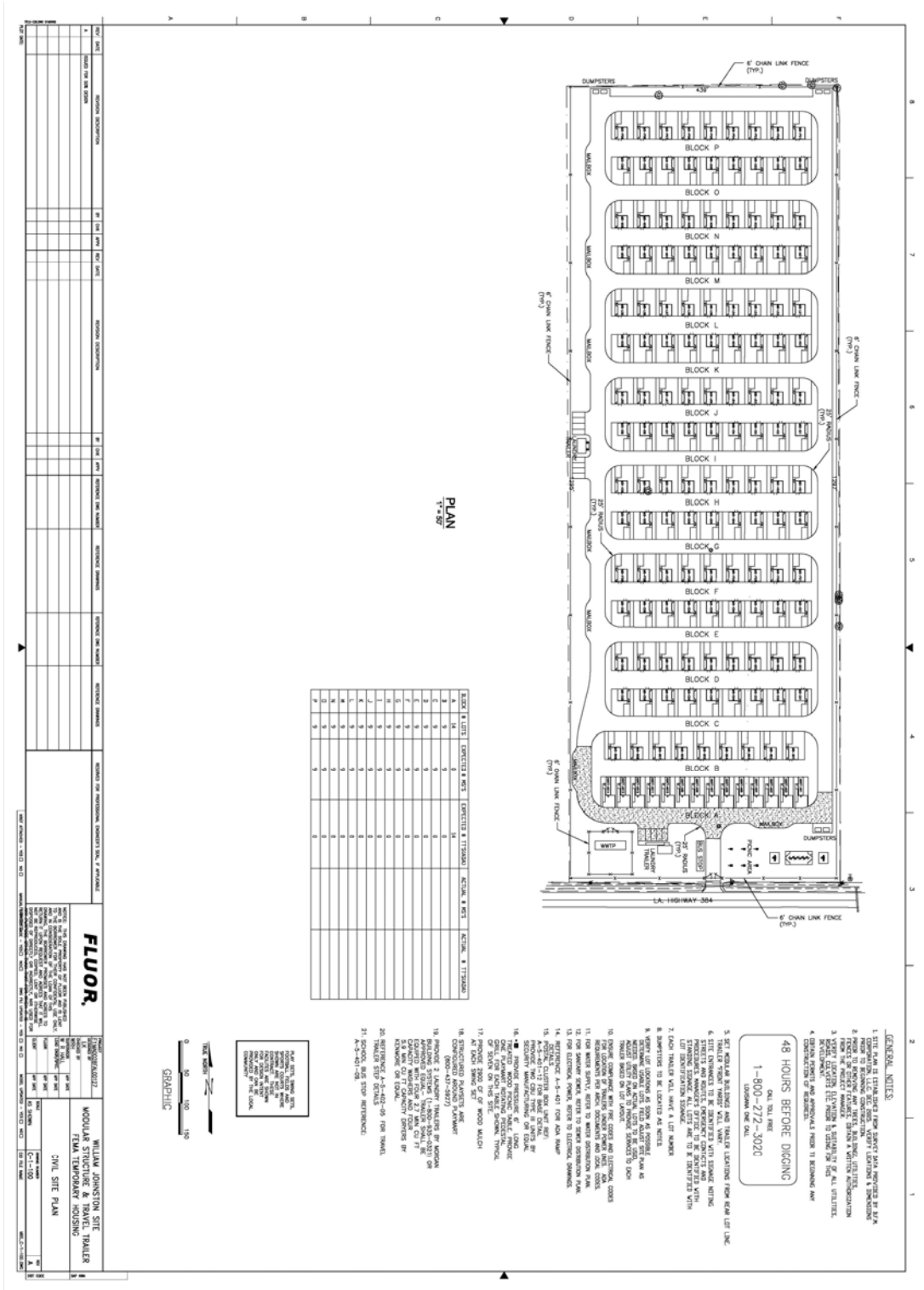
Project area facing East.





Project area facing West, along Hwy 384.

Figure 4. William Johnston Property Site Design (Fluor 2005).



**Attachment 1. Finding of No Significant Impact**