

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
SITING OF A NATIONAL CEMETERY  
SARASOTA, FLORIDA**

**Agency:** National Cemetery Administration (NCA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

**Background:** On November 11, 2003, the President signed the National Cemetery Expansion Act (Public Law 108-109), which requires the VA to establish six national cemeteries in specific areas of the United States by 2007. Sarasota, Florida was designated as one of the six areas to receive a national cemetery. Construction of the Sarasota National Cemetery is needed to fulfill the VA's obligation under PL 108-109, as well as to meet the VA National Cemetery Administration's (NCA) goal to provide all eligible United States veterans with reasonable access to VA burial options. The VA considers reasonable access to mean that an open national or state veteran's cemetery is located within 75 miles of a veteran's place of residence. Currently, the veterans in the Sarasota, Florida area do not have this access.

In accordance with the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1508, as they implement the requirements of the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, 42 U.S.C. § 4321, et seq., the Department of Veterans Affairs conducted an assessment of the potential environmental effects associated with construction of a National Cemetery to serve southwest Florida. The environmental assessment considered all potential impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives, both as solitary actions and in conjunction with other proposed activities. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) summarizes the results of the evaluation of the Proposed Action and alternatives. The discussion focuses on activities that have the potential to change both the natural and human environments.

**Proposed Action:** The proposed action will construct and operate a National Cemetery in Sarasota County. This will include the construction of several structures and burial areas. Structures expected to be built include a Public Information Center, Administration / Maintenance Complex, and Committal Service Shelter and interment areas. Cemetery development will occur in phases with the first phase likely to include construction of the first active burial section in addition to the infrastructure necessary to operate the cemetery. Later phases would include new burial sections and the infrastructure required for the section.

**Alternatives:** Eighteen sites in four counties were initially selected using NCA site selection criteria. Three sites (the Proposed Alternatives) in Sarasota County were identified and evaluated during the environmental assessment process: Hawkins Ranch, Myakka Ranch, and Hi Hat Ranch. Site 2, Hawkins Ranch, is an approximately 466-acre site located four miles east of Interstate 75 (at Exit 205) and is bounded on the north by State Route 72 (SR72). Site 3, Myakka Ranch, is an approximately 574-acre site located 6.5 miles east of Interstate 75 (at Exit 210) on Fruitville Road (SR780). Site 4 is Hi Hat Ranch, an approximately 460-acre site located 6 miles east of Interstate 75 (at Exit 210) on Fruitville Road. The No Action Alternative was also evaluated which would result in no construction activities and not meet the requirements of Public Law 108-109. The environmental effects associated with implementation of the Proposed Action are summarized in the following sections.

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**Geology:** Under the Proposed Alternatives, there would be moderate impacts to the geology of the area resulting from the development of a cemetery at any of the three proposed sites. Excavations for stormwater basins, burial vaults, and building foundations into the subsoils will be required, but no larger scale excavations into the deeper strata would occur. Excavations into and mixing of subsoil layers would result in minor impacts to the near-surface soils profiles.

**Soils:** Under the Proposed Alternatives, it is anticipated that the development of the site considered would result in a moderate impact to soils. Some soil erosion may occur during construction activities; however, implementation of a sediment and erosion control plan such as silt fencing and straw bales, would reduce erosion associated with the project.

**Surface Water and Water Quality:** Cemetery development should have minimal adverse impacts on the area's surface water resources as the cemetery would be developed and managed according to the standards required by state federal laws and regulations as they relate to watershed protection.

**Floodplains:** For Sites 2, 3, and 4, the majority of the proposed cemetery would be located outside the 100-year floodplain. Only small portions of the sites are designated as 100-year floodplain areas. Buildings will be constructed outside of the 100-year floodplain. No construction in the 100-year flood plain is planned.

**Wetlands:** Under the Proposed Action Alternatives, it is anticipated that the site chosen for construction of the new cemetery would require filling of limited areas of federal jurisdictional wetlands. Therefore, wetland impacts would be mitigated by either wetlands creation, restoration, enhancement, preservation, or by mitigation banking. Therefore, there would be minimal net adverse impacts to wetlands. Any activities in wetlands will be appropriately coordinated/permited.

**Vegetation, Fish, and Wildlife:** Under the Proposed Action alternatives, human disturbances and alterations of the sites would have a minimal adverse impact on aquatic and terrestrial species and their habitats.

**Noise:** Under the Proposed Alternatives, there would be minimal adverse impacts due to noise in the area resulting from the development of a cemetery at any of the three proposed sites. Temporary increases in noise levels would occur during each phase of cemetery construction, and from noises associated with funerals, including traffic from the corteges, "taps" or other music, and gun salutes.

**Traffic and Transportation:** Under the Proposed Alternatives, there would be minimal adverse impact to traffic and transportation. Funerals and employee and visitor activity at the proposed cemetery would increase the traffic volume at the chosen site.

**Florida Coastal Zone Management:** The Proposed Alternatives are anticipated to be consistent with the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) and the Florida CZMA.

**Other Environmental Concerns:** It was determined that under the Proposed Alternatives there would be no negative impacts to air quality, groundwater, aesthetics, cultural resources,

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community services, infrastructure, land use, economic activity, utilities, and solid or hazardous wastes.

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:** Based upon my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached Environmental Assessment, incorporated by reference, I conclude that implementation of the Proposed Action will not have a significant environmental impact. Accordingly, the requirements of NEPA are fulfilled and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The Sarasota Herald-Tribune will publish a Notice of Availability on December 19, 2005



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National Cemetery Administration  
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12.13.05

Date

Attachment: Environmental Assessment