

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS INTERIOR ALASKA VETERANS CEMETERY AK-09-01 SALCHA, ALASKA

Introduction

The Alaska Department of Veterans Affairs (DMVA) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to identify, analyze, and document the potential physical, environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts that may result from the construction and operation of a new Interior Alaska Veterans Cemetery (IAVC) on a 257.5-acre parcel of land in Salcha, Alaska. The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) as amended (42 United States Code [USC] § 4321 et seq.), the Veterans Affairs (VA) NEPA regulations, "Environmental Effects of the Department of Veterans Affairs Actions" (38 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Part 26), the VA's NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects (VA 2010), and VA Directive 0067 - NEPA Implementation (VA 2013).

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to establish a new national cemetery of sufficient size and capacity to serve projected burial needs. The Fairbanks area has the second densest population of Veterans in Alaska, with an estimated 11,000 Veterans residing within a 75-mile radius of the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB). There are currently two national cemeteries in Alaska, the Fort Richardson National Cemetery (located 350 miles south of Fairbanks) and the Sitka National Cemetery (located 680 southeast of Fairbanks). The new cemetery would provide additional burial capacity, as well as improved cemetery access (reduced travel time), for Interior Alaska Veterans and their families.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would develop a cemetery for Veterans of Alaska as well as a place for memorial services and periodic visitations by friends and family members. The Proposed Action includes the full Master Plan developed for the IAVC and is comprised of two Phases.

Phase I activities include:

- construction of an entrance road, parking areas, and pathways,
- installation of 600 columbarium niches (two walls), 358 pre-placed crypts, and space for 294 in ground cremains,
- widening and paving of Westerlund Street, within the existing right-of-way, to provide primary access to the cemetery from Johnson Road,
- grading and resurfacing De Halden Lane,
- construction of an administration / maintenance building with garage,
- construction of an entry monument and gate, committal shelter, memorial wall, flag assembly area, cremated remains scattering garden, and public information center,
- the existing well will be improved and a septic system will be installed along with fencing, gate(s), lights, fuel storage, signage, and drainage structures as appropriate.

Phase II components represent the remaining build out of the IAVC through 2076 based on anticipated internment needs. These components include the installation of 1,000 columbarium niches (five walls), 2,272 pre-placed crypts, and 798 inground cremain plots.

The Proposed Action also includes long term operation of the cemetery. Operations would include administration activities, custodial services, and regularly scheduled landscaping and maintenance to ensure the upkeep of the grounds and associated physical infrastructure such as roads and buildings.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the DMVA would not construct a cemetery or any of the items associated with the Proposed Action. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need for the project but is kept for further analysis to provide a baseline with which to compare potential effects of the Proposed Action.

Environmental Analysis

The EA identifies the environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action and determines the significance of the impact, if any, on each of these resources. See **Table 1** for a summary of all potential impacts identified.

Identified potential impacts are less than significant and would be further reduced through careful implementation of general best management practices (BMPs); management, minimization and avoidance measures; and compliance with regulatory requirements, as identified in the Draft EA.

The Proposed Action would have a beneficial impact through the addition of the community service provided by the IAVC. This service would be available to Veterans and their families across the Interior and the state. The Proposed Action would result in a socioeconomic benefit by providing an influx of visitors, seasonal hires, and new permanent employees.

1. Mitigation

Proposed mitigation measures to avoid adverse impacts are listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Comparison of the Potential Effects of the Analyzed Alternatives and Mitigation

Resource Category	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative	Mitigation
Aesthetics	Minor adverse impact to adjacent landowners	No Impact	None proposed.
Air Quality	Short-term minor impact from construction. Minor long-term impact from increased traffic and groundskeeping.	No Impact	Watering of unpaved and disturbed areas to reduce fugitive dust emissions, limiting extent of ground disturbing activities at any one time, stabilizing inactive areas and soil stockpiles, and regular equipment maintenance.
Cultural Resources	No impact expected based on finding of No Historic Properties Affected though Section 106 process.	No Impact	Inadvertent Discovery Plan requires mandatory training for Contractor and details procedures should any resources be identified during construction.

Resource Category	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative	Mitigation
Geology and Soils	Minor adverse impact from 12-acre ground disturbance	No Impact	Limiting the amount of soil disturbed at any given time, applying water or dust palliative, and maintaining soil stockpiles to prevent erosion.
Hydrology and Water Quality	Short-term minor impact from construction. No long-term impacts expected	No Impact	Stormwater BMPs will be utilized during construction to prevent the transport of sediment-laden water beyond construction limits.
Wildlife and Habitat	Short-term minor, indirect impact from construction. Minor, indirect long-term impact	No Impact	All on-site revegetation and landscaping will require the use of native plant species and organic fertilizer.
Noise	Short-term minor impacts from construction and minor long-term impacts from rifle salutes.	No impact	Work hours may be limited to 7 am to 7 pm to mitigate impacts from construction noise. Neighbors will be notified prior to rifle salutes.
Land Use	Minor adverse impact from reduction in rural nature of land use resulting in increased traffic and road upgrades. Beneficial impact from the natural beauty of the property now being accessible to the public.	No Impact	None proposed.
Floodplains and Wetlands	No impacts expected	No Impact	Stormwater BMPs will be utilized during construction to prevent the transport of sediment-laden water beyond construction limits.
Socioeconomics	Beneficial impact from local employment opportunity. No adverse impacts anticipated.	No Impact	None proposed.
Community Services and Utilities	No adverse impacts expected. Beneficial impact from having a cemetery in the Interior.	No Impact	None proposed.

Resource Category	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative	Mitigation
Solid and Hazardous Materials	Minor negative impacts possible from storage of chemicals on-site	No Impact	All materials used onsite will be labeled and handled according to State and Federal guidelines to prevent against any accidental spills. Above ground fuel storage tanks will be inspected regularly.
Transportation and Parking	Minor negative impacts due to increased traffic	No Impact	Improvements to Westerlund Street and De Halden Lane as well as regular road maintenance when cemetery is in operation.

2. Agency, Tribal, and Public Comment

The DMVA has consulted with appropriate federal, state, and local regulatory agencies, and federally recognized Native Alaskan Tribes identified as having possible ancestral ties to the project area. This consultation is documented in the Draft EA. Comments and input submitted by regulatory agencies, the public, and tribal consulting parties have been addressed in the Draft EA.

This Draft EA and Draft FONSI are being made available for public review and comment from June 23 through July 25, 2025. A Notice of Availability was published on the State of Alaska Online Public Notices website and published in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner.

3. Finding of No Significant Impact

After careful review of the EA, I have concluded that implementation of the Proposed Action would not generate controversy or have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. This analysis fulfills the requirements of NEPA Regulations. An Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared and the DMVA on behalf of the National Cemetery Administration of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact.

DRAFT

Date

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Alaska State Offices of Veterans Affairs