

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail
Virginia/Tennessee/North Carolina/South Carolina

PROPOSED HEADQUARTERS/VISITOR CONTACT STATION

Finding of No Significant Impact February 2011

The Preferred Alternative does not constitute an action that requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Preferred Alternative will not have a significant adverse effect on the human environment. There are no unmitigated adverse effects to physical resources, water resources, natural resources, cultural resources, or other unique resources within the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, or known cumulative effects were identified.

After careful and thorough consideration of the facts contained herein, the undersigned finds that the proposed Federal actions are consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives as set forth in section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and that they will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise include any condition requiring consultation pursuant to Section 102 (2) (c) of NEPA.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an EIS is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul Carson", written over a horizontal line.

Date:

2/9/11

Paul Carson
Superintendent
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail

Approved:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Vela", written over a horizontal line. The word "For" is written to the left of the signature.

For David Vela
Regional Director
Southeast Region

Date:

2/22/11

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to establish a new Headquarters (HQ) and Visitor Contact Station (VCS) for the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (Overmountain or Trail). The Trail is a 330-mile-long motorized and non-motorized route for public use that preserves and interprets the route of the Overmountain Men, patriot forces that marched south from various points during the Revolutionary War and defeated loyalist forces in the Battle at Kings Mountain in South Carolina. The battle proved to be a turning point in the American Revolutionary War. The Trail traverses portions of Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

In recent years, the Trail has dramatically increased its visibility and regional importance. The NPS has collaborated with more than 100 partner groups and organizations to expand the Trail into nearly 74 miles of marked trail sections available for public use, an increase of 58 miles since 2002. Currently, more than one million people use marked trail sections annually. As a result of this increased regional presence and involvement, as well as growing public support for the Trail and its history, additional NPS presence is needed to accomplish operational and administrative tasks and assist partners with various projects and initiatives. Expanded and regional NPS presence is currently inhibited by the lack of a dedicated and centrally located Overmountain facility.

The purpose of this action is to provide an HQ/VCS facility in a location near the geographic center of the trail to accommodate the functions associated with the expanding regional presence of the Trail. These functions include space to accommodate multiple staff, meetings, storage, educational and interpretive exhibits, and special events.

The current HQ is located in loaned office space at Kings Mountain National Military Park, at the southernmost terminus of the Trail, in Blacksburg, SC, and the existing NPS staff presence is limited to the superintendent, who is the only federal employee assigned to Overmountain. This facility's remote location at the southern terminus is inefficient and hinders management, as Trail personnel must often travel farther distances to Trail-related meetings, and the distances often necessitate overnight travel. There is no visitor facility dedicated primarily to the Trail.

SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Selection of a preferred alternative was accomplished by using the Choosing by Advantage (CBA), a value-based decision making process based on calculating and compiling the advantages of different alternatives for a variety of factors. By using the CBA process, and an accompanying Value Analysis process, the NPS used an objective approach to determine which of the alternatives would be the best location for the trail's new headquarters and visitor contact station. The alternatives were examined in detail, given the information available on existing conditions, and conceptual site plans were developed for each alternative. The CBA workshop participants consisted of the trail superintendent, a representative from the NPS Southeast Regional Office the Overmountain Victory Trail Association (OVTA), and the consulting team. Participants met at the current trail headquarters at Kings Mountain National Military Park during the week of May 3, 2010 to conduct the CBA process that identified the preferred alternative. An earlier CBA workshop had narrowed the number of sites to be carried forward for further evaluation from 18 to four.

In the CBA process, factors represent areas of concern that were expressed by the NPS technical advisors and park staff. High and low assessment criteria were established for each factor. High criteria describe very favorable or desirable environmental conditions. A minimum criterion generally reflects the minimum standards permitted by federal law or NPS policy. Advantages were determined by evaluating the difference between attributes for each factor among the alternatives.

“Attributes” are considered to be the elements of a “factor” are in CBA terminology, and attributes were identified for each of the factors. There were three factors considered in the CBA analysis for the Overmountain HQ/VCS facility:

- Provide for visitor enjoyment
- Improve efficiency of park operations
- Provide cost effective, environmentally responsible, and otherwise beneficial development for the NPS.

Under the factor of “provide for visitor enjoyment,” the “attributes,” or measures, of the factor were determined to be ability of site to improve visitor experience, ability to direct the public to the trail, and opportunities to supplement visitor education or communicate history. The attribute for “improve efficiency of park operations” was reduction of staff response time. The attribute for “provide cost-effective, environmentally responsible, and otherwise beneficial development for the NPS” was the opportunity to create an expandable, cost-effective development.

The advantages of each factor were determined and these advantages were compared to one another, to determine which advantage was most important to this project, or “paramount.” The next step was to compare the other advantages to this “paramount advantage” to determine their importance relative to the paramount advantage and then to assign an appropriate score for each. After this exercise was completed, the scores of each alternative were calculated, and the alternative that scored the highest was considered the preferred alternative.

CBA workshops and follow up value analyses ensure that all viable project alternatives are considered, the evaluation criteria are sound, the selected solutions are cost-effective, an independent opinion is provided, and all proposed alternatives satisfy basic project objectives.

The results of the CBA/VA process concluded that the Rocky Ford Access site at the trailhead for the Catawba Greenway was identified as the preferred alternative site because the site has the best opportunities for visitor enjoyment, it is closest to the most Trail resources with easy ability to direct visitors to them, and it is available to the NPS at no cost. In addition, the site does not have significant constraints to development and its location would be best at reducing staff response time, given the proximity to major thoroughfares. The site provided the most advantage when the site’s benefits and cost of development were analyzed together.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Rocky Ford Access Site, Morganton, North Carolina

The Selected Alternative includes the construction and implementation of an HQ/VCS at the Rocky Ford access to the Catawba Greenway (Greenway), in Morganton, NC. The Greenway is a certified Trail segment, and the Overmountain's Commemorative Motor Route runs adjacent to the site. Morganton is near the geographic center of the Trail, and runs along the river where the Overmountain Men forded the river before gathering at Charles McDowell's Quaker Meadows nearby estate.

The site is approximately six acres, is owned by the City of Morganton, and sits on the banks of the Catawba River. The site is on a rise that drops off to the river, steeply in the southwestern part of the site, and more gently on the northern end of the site. Although there is regulated flood plain on the property, the proposed location for the HQ/VCS on the site is outside the floodplain. The southern portion of the property is a mix of woodland and scrub that has been overtaken by the invasive vine kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*). There is an unpaved parking area that currently provides access to the Greenway. The Greenway access would be incorporated into the design. Access to the site is provided off a steep unpaved road from US 64/NC 18 to the south. This road is part of the trail's Commemorative Motor Route. The western portion of the property is very steep and would require extensive grading and site clearing prior to any construction. The site may require relocation of the entrance by several yards, and the addition of acceleration/deceleration lanes on the road to ensure safety. There are no other natural or manmade site constraints that would impede development. The property would be provided to the NPS by the City of Morganton at no cost.

The proposed HQ/VCS will be approximately 5,100 gsf, and the site would also include an access road, parking area, and landscaped interpretive area. The parking area would provide spaces for 25 cars, and five buses or recreational vehicles. On-site stormwater management will be implemented using biofiltration or another appropriate low impact practice and the parking areas would be finished with pervious pavement. The building will contain office space for staff, meeting space, storage, and an area for interpretation.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the Selected Alternative, the NPS analyzed the No Action Alternative and three additional locations for the proposed HQ/VCS. Two of the three additional locations were also in Morganton, and the third site was in Marion, NC, about 20 miles from Morganton, and is still near the geographic center of the Trail, and is another town where events important related to the march occurred.

No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, the existing loaned office space at Kings Mountain National Military Park would continue to be used as the Trail HQ, and no VCS would be built. The Trail would continue to use various facilities along the 330-mile-long trail for interpretive opportunities and to store supplies. The existing educational and interpretive exhibits at the Kings Mountain National Military Park and at a U.S. Forest Service facility in Nebo, NC, would continue to serve as the Trail's only formal presence outside the HQ (although several trail partners have developed trail-related interpretive exhibits). The no action alternative was not selected, as it would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

Action Alternatives

Alternative A: Joseph McDowell House, Marion, NC

The Joseph McDowell House is a 2,400-gsf structure located on a 4.09-acre site located along the North Fork of the Catawba River and U.S. Highway 70 West, approximately 0.1 mile from the intersection with Highway 221 in Marion, NC. The original structure, which has been extensively altered and added onto for commercial use in the late twentieth century, was built in 1787 by Colonel Joseph McDowell, the founder and namesake of McDowell County and a prominent figure in the Battle of Kings Mountain.

The site is located on the Commemorative Motor Route for the Overmountain Trail, and the structure is a certified Trail, one of 34 non-federal historical resources which are directly or indirectly related to the Trail. McDowell County has also identified the property as a future access point for the McDowell Greenway Trail that will run along the river, and connect several points of interest. The property is located in a commercial area between two restaurants. It is zoned for general commercial use.

The Joseph McDowell House is currently owned and managed by McDowell County through an inter-local agreement between McDowell County Tourism Authority, the City of Marion, NC, and McDowell County, NC. At present, the house has been leased to a local business and nonprofit organization, while the county considers renovations to restore and renovate the property. The property would be provided to the NPS at no cost.

The site is principally constrained by its location within the 100-year and 500-year floodplains. The property is entirely within a regulated floodplain, mostly the 100-year floodplain, although an embankment at the rear of the property is in the 500-year floodplain before sloping steeply to the river. In addition, there is also a potentially significant archeological site present. As a result, any new development that exceeds the current footprint of the existing buildings could be problematic. Nevertheless, the property represents a viable location for the placement of the new HQ/VCS and its size would adequately accommodate the program elements.

Site improvements would include restoration and adaptive reuse of the original dwelling, and replacement of the twentieth century additions with a new 2500-gsf addition to provide the space necessary to fulfill the functions of the HQ/VCS. Additional improvements include parking, driveways, and low impact stormwater management.

Primary access to and from the site would be from the east off U.S. Highway 70, with parking to the west of the property. Because of the embankment, the site slopes upward toward the north so any new development in that area would require some grading to maintain positive drainage.

This site was not selected, principally because the impacts to the floodplain would be hard to overcome while working with the existing structure on the site to ensure life safety. The site was furthest from the trail itself, although the Joseph McDowell House is a certified trail site.

Alternative B: Site Adjacent to Quaker Meadows House, Morganton, NC

This 2.75-acre parcel is located at the intersection of NC 181 and St. Mary's Church Road in Morganton, Burke County, NC, and is on the property adjacent to the Quaker Meadows House, or Quaker Meadows McDowell House, a certified site on the Trail. The Quaker Meadows House is listed on the NRHP, and was built in 1812 by Colonel Charles McDowell, Jr. Like the adjacent Quaker Meadows House, the parcel was once part of the McDowell estate, where on September

30, 1780, Colonel Charles McDowell, Major Joseph McDowell, and other Overmountain Men convened on the property prior to marching to the Battle of Kings Mountain. The site is currently owned by Reliant Power and is available to the NPS at fair market value.

The property is currently undeveloped and is adjacent to low-density commercial development and the Quaker Meadows House. The parcel is zoned for industrial use, but could be rezoned. The site is relatively flat and currently undeveloped, but traces of its former use as a dairy distribution facility still remain (mainly two concrete pads) and would be demolished prior to any new construction. There are no other natural or manmade site constraints that would impede development. As a result, the property represents a viable location for the placement of the new HQ/VCS, and its size would adequately accommodate the program elements.

The development of this site would necessitate the new construction of a 5,100-gsf building, access road, parking area, and landscaped interpretive area, similar to the other alternatives. On-site stormwater management would be implemented using biofiltration, or equivalent low impact development practices.

The adjacent Quaker Meadows House itself is a certified site on the trail and was originally under consideration as a potential location for the HQ/VCS, but was dismissed during the site visit, as the office and visitor contact uses needed by the NPS would be incompatible with the current use of the property as a museum, and it would be difficult to install the needed modern improvements to the house in a manner consistent with the Secretary of Interior's Standards .

This site was not selected because it was offered to the NPS for fair market value. The other sites were offered to the NPS at no cost. Zoning was also an issue, although the city has stated that it would entertain a zoning change.

Alternative C: Catawba Meadows Park, Morganton, NC

The site under this alternative is located in Catawba Meadows Park, a 200-acre regional recreational park in Morganton, NC, along the banks of the Catawba River. The site is approximately 5.7 acres and is adjacent to the main entrance of the park. The remainder of the park is being developed as a regional facility for softball and baseball, and other recreational activities such as Frisbee golf. The site is owned by the City of Morganton and would be provided to NPS at no cost; maintenance costs would be shared.

The site is located immediately inside the main entrance of Catawba Meadows Park, which is accessed off the US 64 bypass (Sanford Drive). The offered site is currently undeveloped and used as a recreational playing field. There is a low fence around the perimeter of the site on the sides adjacent to the road and entrance drive into the park. There are no other natural or manmade site constraints that would impede development. As a result, the property represents a viable location for the placement of the new HQ/VCS, and its size would adequately accommodate the program elements.

Catawba Meadows Park includes ball fields, picnic areas, rental cabins, playgrounds, and an extensive trail system connecting to the Greenway. The parcel is zoned for low density residential/multi-family, as there is no recreational or park zone in Morganton. Nearby properties are large-lot residential. There is a North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund conservation easement on the entire park parcel that stipulates no more than 10% of the park property may be impervious surface.

The Catawba River Greenway recreational trail, runs along the river through Catawba Meadows Park, and is close to the alternative site for the HQ/VCS. A 2.5-mile section of the greenway has been designated as a non-motorized portion of the Trail.

As with the other alternatives, development of this site would necessitate the new construction of a 5,100-gsf building, access road, parking area, and landscaped interpretive area. The site would be accessed via a new access road off the Catawba Meadows Park entrance road. On-site stormwater management would be implemented using biofiltration or an appropriate equivalent.

This site was not selected as the setting in a park focused on recreational activity, including the placement of a ropes course adjacent to the site was not as appropriate to the HQ/VCS purpose as other sites.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferable alternative is determined by applying the criteria from Section 2.7 (D) of NPS Director's Order 12. These are the same criteria outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which is guided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations. CEQ regulations provide direction that "the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will best promote the national environmental policy" as expressed in Section 101(b) of NEPA:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use that would permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources (NEPA, Section 101)

This means that the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it is also the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.

Based on the analysis of environmental consequences of each alternative, the NPS determined that the Quaker Meadows site is the environmentally preferable alternative, as it would require the least amount of disturbance to the site, would result in more aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings than Catawba Meadows, and would best preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of any of the sites by further protecting the landscape around Quaker Meadows from incompatible development. The Quaker Meadows site does not, however, meet other criteria or objectives as well as the Rocky Ford Access site; the Rocky Ford Access site is immediately adjacent to both a certified walking segment of the trail and to the Commemorative

Motor Route, and the Quaker Meadows site is only available to the NPS at fair market value, and not at no cost like the other sites.

THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts that may have both beneficial and adverse aspects and which on balance may be beneficial, but that may still have significant adverse impacts which require analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):

No significant adverse impacts were found that would require analysis in an EIS.

Construction of the HQ/VCS at the selected alternative site will result in long-term benefits to park management and operations, visitor use and experience due to the centralized location, appropriate park-like setting, and proximity to Trail resources. There will be short-term and long term beneficial impacts to socioeconomics, resulting from construction and operation of the HQ/VCS.

There will be no impacts to land use, floodplains or historic sites or structures at this site. Impacts on archeological resources are not anticipated, although the NPS will continue to work in consultation with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office to ensure compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. Minimal disturbance in the floodplain to link the greenway trail to the other improvements on the site will occur, but it will not result in any impact to floodplain function or values.

There will be short and long term minor impacts to water resources related to contributions of stormwater to the Catawba River from the site, and long-term negligible impacts to vegetation, as much of the site that will be disturbed has extensive invasive and nonnative vegetation that will be removed and trees removed will be replaced. Similarly, there will be short and long-term negligible to minor adverse impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat; portions of the site will be disturbed and graded, but other changes, such as establishment of a riparian buffer, and the management of the kudzu will improve habitat on the site. Impacts to soils will be long-term minor and adverse, as there will be compaction from grading and soil disturbance. These impacts could be mitigated.

The degree to which the action affects public health and safety:

No impacts to public health or safety are anticipated from the construction of the HQ/VCS. Standard measures, such as fencing off construction areas, providing signage, and following safe work practices during the construction period will be taken to protect health and safety of both the public and construction workers.

The new facility will be designed to comply with life safety, mechanical, electrical other relevant codes and regulations, so there will be potential long term beneficial effects on health and safety. In addition, the facility will be constructed in compliance with the requirements set forth under Americans with Disabilities and the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards for federal construction, providing safe access for individuals with disabilities.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas:

The Rocky Ford Access site has been disturbed in the past, including the installation of the Greenway trail and parking lot, and improvements related to highway upgrades, such as installation of stormwater drainage. There is evidence of a good amount of clearing on the site in the past. There are no extant structures within the project area, and no recorded archaeological sites, NRHP-listed resources, or Native American sacred or religious sites at Rocky Ford Access. A consultation letter was mailed to the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribal Preservation Officer for the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians on July 12, 2010, describing the proposed project. No response was received from the Tribal preservation officer. The State Historic Preservation Office noted that there are no known archeological resources at the site, but that resources could be present and recommended further coordination with the office as the project moves forward, and consultation will continue. These agencies also had the opportunity to review and comment on the Environmental Assessment (EA). No comments were received.

In addition, there are no prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecological critical areas within the proposed project area for the Preferred Alternative. The City of Morganton mandates riparian buffers to protect water quality in the Catawba River, but the site has adequate room to accommodate the buffer; therefore, no impacts will occur.

Degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:

The overall effects on the human environment will be beneficial as a result of the implementation of the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative will provide educational opportunities for visitors and the local community. Land use will not be significantly affected, and it is expected that the HQ/VCS will contribute to the local economy by providing a small number of long-term NPS jobs and attracting visitors to the area. The construction of the center will also create some short-term construction jobs. The design of the facility will integrate the greenway into the site, and provide interpretive opportunities and space for special events that will benefit visitors and the community.

There were no highly controversial effects identified during the preparation of the EA or the public review period associated with the project. The EA was made available for a 30-day public review from November 15, 2010 through December 15, 2010, and 45 public comments were received. Overall the majority of the comments supported the Preferred Alternative, sites in Morganton or Burke County generally, although several also stated support for Alternative A, which is in Marion. However, there were two substantive comments that are addressed in an Errata Sheet attached to this FONSI. These comments, although substantive, did not reveal anything that will significantly and adversely affect the human environment.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:

No uncertain risks are expected in association with the construction and operation of the HQ/VCS at the Rocky Ford Access site.

Unique or unknown risks associated with the construction and operation of the HC/VCS are expected to be low to none.

Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration:

The construction and operation of the HQ/VCS at the Rocky Ford Access site neither establishes a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle for future consideration.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts:

When added to other past, present, or future actions in the Rocky Ford Access area, short-term, minor, adverse, cumulative impacts are expected to soils, and water resources. Long-term, minor, adverse, cumulative impacts are expected to soils, vegetation, water resources, and wildlife and wildlife habitat. Long-term, beneficial cumulative impacts to park management and operations, visitor use and experience, socioeconomics, and land use also expected.

No cumulative impacts to floodplains, archeological resources, or historic structures and sites are expected.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources:

The Preferred Alternative is not expected to have any short-term or long-term, adverse impacts to historic or cultural resources. The site has been disturbed in the past, including installation of both the Catawba Greenway and a parking area. There are not currently any structures on the site, other than a kiosk serving the Greenway, and no NHRP-listed sites or districts. The area surrounding the site consists of a forested area, with Catawba Meadows Park beyond it, a health care facility and senior residential community, and undeveloped land across the river. The site is not within the view shed of any historic sites, and historic resources are not visible from the site. There will therefore be no impacts to any historic districts or structures.

There are no known or recorded archaeological sites, or Native American sacred or religious sites in the Rocky Ford Access project area. Consultation letters were mailed to both the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office and the Tribal Preservation Officer for the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians on July 12, 2010, describing the proposed project. No response was received from the Tribal preservation officer. The State Historic Preservation Office noted that there are no known archeological resources at the site, but noted that resources could be present and recommended further coordination with the office as the project moves forward, which the NPS will do. These agencies also had the opportunity to review and comment on the EA. No comments were received.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat:

Consultation between the NPS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources took place in July 2010. These agencies stated that no federal or state listed species or habitats are known to occur within the proposed project areas. Therefore, no impact to endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat will occur under the Preferred Alternative.

Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law:

The Preferred Alternative would not violate federal, state, or local environmental protection laws. The HQ/VCS would be developed consistently with them.

MITIGATION MEASURES FOR THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

To minimize resource impacts, the following mitigation measures were part of the analyses in the EA and will be followed during implementation of the Preferred Alternative. These actions will lessen the potential for adverse effects of the Preferred Alternative, and have been proven to be very effective in reducing environmental impacts on previous projects.

MITIGATION MEASURES OF THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE	
Visitor Use and Experience	▪ Public information will be made available on the Trail website and on signs in the nearby areas to inform visitors of temporary closures of resources within the project area. ▪ Construction workers and employees will follow an approved health and safety plan which incorporates all applicable regulations. ▪ Barriers and signs will be used around construction sites to divert the public from potentially dangerous situations. ▪ Project will be developed in conformance with applicable life safety and building codes, and in conformance with accessibility guidelines.
Land Use	▪ The planning and design will conform to applicable state and local land regulations and ordinances related to land use.
Floodplains	▪ Placement of the HQ/VCS structure will occur outside the floodplain to protect against risk of harm to life and property. Parking and pedestrian walkways would also be located outside the floodplain to the extent possible, and finished with a pervious surface that would not affect floodplain function. Approval for unavoidable disturbance in the floodplain associated with Alternative A would be sought from the NPS director in keeping with NPS <i>Management Policies 2006</i>. ▪ Site grading and improvements will be designed to prevent reconfigurations that introduce adverse changes to floodplain function.

MITIGATION MEASURES OF THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE	
Soil	▪ During construction, exposed soils will be covered with plastic sheeting, jute matting, erosion netting, straw, or other suitable cover material to prevent soil erosion and movement during rain or wind events. ▪ Erosion-containment controls such as silt fencing and sediment traps (e.g., hay bales) will be used to contain sediment onsite. ▪ Best management practices for erosion and sediment control, such as silt fencing, use of hay bales and sediment ponds, and other measures appropriate to the site will be employed during and after construction, including stabilization and revegetation after construction is completed. ▪ Replacement soil, which would be brought in from elsewhere, should not come from pristine sites and should be salvaged, in accordance with NPS policy.
Vegetation	▪ Trees removed to accommodate the HQ/VCS at any of the sites would be replaced within the project area. Tree species for replacement trees will be native or historically appropriate. ▪ The NPS will protect the root zones of mature trees within the construction zone by placing fencing around the perimeter of the trees to prevent heavy equipment from compaction within the root zones or causing damage to the bark. ▪ Invasive non-native vegetation will be removed and replaced with native or historically appropriate plantings within the project area.
Wildlife Habitat	▪ Riparian buffers will be planted to the extent possible to protect and enhance wildlife passage corridors along the river, to provide shade for aquatic wildlife, and to serve as a source of coarse woody debris, which also enhances aquatic habitat.
Water Resources	▪ Site design will include stormwater quality and quantity management to protect water quality. Low impact development stormwater management practices will be employed. ▪ To mitigate against short-term adverse effects during construction, sediment and erosion control measures will be implemented to prevent sediment runoff into adjacent water bodies or nearby storm sewers. ▪ Riparian buffers will be planted to the extent possible to enhance shoreline stability, provide some filtration of runoff, and provide shade by the river, which helps prevent thermal problems for aquatic wildlife and enhances aquatic habitat. The preference by USFWS in their consultation correspondence is for 100-foot-wide buffers on perennial streams and rivers, and 50-foot-wide buffers on intermittent streams, which will be followed to the extent possible.
Archeological Resources	▪ Consultation with the NC State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) will continue through the design process to ensure that sites are surveyed and adverse impacts are minimized and mitigated.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The NPS conducted both internal and external (public) scoping early in the project to inform various agencies and the public about the proposed HQ/VCS for Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail. To determine the scope of issues to be analyzed in depth within this FS/EA, meetings were conducted with NPS staff, interested stakeholders, and members of the public. An internal scoping meeting was held with the NPS in February 2009 at the Overmountain HQ. Public scoping began on October 29, 2009, and ended on December 18, 2009. During this time, public meetings were held in four locations:

- November 4 at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park in Elizabethton, TN
- November 17 at the McDowell Arts Center in Marion, NC
- November 18 at the Old Burke County Courthouse in Morganton, NC
- November 19 at Limestone College's Stephenson Dining Hall in Gaffney, SC

The NPS notified interested parties of these meetings by distributing official letters to Overmountain partner organizations, and senate and congressional offices. In addition, meeting announcements were posted in several media outlets along the Trail, including the *Bristol News*, *Elizabethton Star*, *McDowell News*, *Morganton News Herald*, and *Gaffney Ledger*.

Attendees included individuals, organizations, and government representatives interested in learning more about the project, providing comments about the preliminary alternatives, and expressing issues and concerns. The meeting consisted of an open house during which attendees had the opportunity to read about the project on information posters. The National Park Service and consultant team were available to answer questions and to solicit comments. Meeting attendees were also provided the opportunity to submit comments via a standard form or online via the OVVI FS/EA project website.

At the end of the public comment period on December 18, 2009, 404 public comments were submitted via e-mail, U.S. Postal Service, in person, or on the Park's PEPC website. Of these comments, 89 percent were submitted by members of the public (70 percent from individuals and 19 percent from groups and organizations) and 11 percent were submitted by government agencies, individuals, or representatives. Most of the comments stated a desire for the HQ/VCS to be sited in their own community. Other themes and concerns that arose from the public comments were consideration of the Trail's history; the socioeconomic impacts of the new HQ/VCS, the need to increase educational and interpretive opportunities, and the need to increase tourism opportunities.

Attendees included individuals, organizations, and government representatives interested in learning more about the project, providing comments about the preliminary alternatives, and expressing issues and concerns. The meeting consisted of an open house during which attendees had the opportunity to read about the project on information posters. The NPS and the consultant team were available to answer questions and to solicit comments. Meeting attendees were also provided the opportunity to submit comments via a standard form or online via the Trail FS/EA project website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkID=400&projectId=25061>).

Consultation letters were mailed to four state, federal, and Tribal agencies on July 12, 2010, requesting consultation and comments regarding the proposed project. Responses were received from the USFWS and North Carolina Natural Heritage Program stating that no special status species are located within the proposed project sites. A response was also received from the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office stating that there are no NHRP-listed or eligible architectural resources on the Rocky Ford Access site, and no known archeological resources, although consultation should continue through the design and development process as there could be resources in the area.

The EA was distributed to local, state, and federal agencies, public officials, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, and the public for review and comment for a 30-day public review from November 15, 2010 through December 15, 2010. There were two public hearings, one each in Morganton, NC and Marion, NC, during this period, on December 7 and 8, 2010. In total, 53 pieces of correspondence were received, often with multiple comments within each. The majority of the comments, however, simply stated support for the Preferred Alternative, supported location of the project in Morganton or Burke County generally, or stated support for the site in Marion. Speakers at the public hearings tended to express support for sites in Morganton or Marion according to the location of the hearing. Comments submitted online, or by mail favored the preferred site or other Morganton sites. U.S. Congressman Heath Shuler, who represents North Carolina's 11th District, which includes Marion, sent a letter of support for the site in Marion. The North Carolina Department of the Environment's Water Supply office stated that the Rocky Ford Access site and its proposed improvements would not pose a significant impact. The North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources stated agreement with the findings in the environmental assessment concerning historic resources, and requested continued coordination with the department regarding the potential for archeological resources, including completion of an archeological survey report for the selected location.

Two sets of comments questioned or stated concerns about specific elements of the Preferred Alternative and are addressed in an Errata Sheet attached to this FONSI. These comments specifically speak to concerns about how to ensure safe ingress and egress from the site, and concerns about floodplain.

**Errata Sheet on the Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment for a New
Headquarters and Visitor Contact Station
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail**

Comments were received during the public comment period and warrant the preparation and distribution of an errata sheet on the above referenced Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment. This sheet will become part of the project file. The representative comments and responses are as follows:

1. *Comment:*

One of the presenters at the public hearing, in comparing the Joseph McDowell house and Marion, and the Rocky Ford Access site, noted that the "McDowell House is in a flood plain, and the other -- and Ford's Crossing is in high land. But when the greenway -- the Morganton greenway was 10 to 15 feet underwater, the McDowell House was relatively dry."

No specifics were given as to when the flood referenced in the comments occurred.

Response:

Further research and confirmation was done on the floodplain for both sites. The great floods in the Region in July 1916 flooded most of the Catawba River valley, and washed out the railroad bridge to the south of the Rocky Ford Access site, at the current location of the NC Highway 181 Bridge. No information was available on how either the Marion or the Rocky Ford Access sites fared in that flood, or in subsequent floods.

Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, are the basis for evaluating floodplain and calculating flood risk nationwide. The FIRM maps were updated for Burke County in September 2007, and confirm that the majority of the Rocky Ford Access site is outside any regulated floodplain, although the greenway itself is within the regulated floodplain, and would therefore be more likely to flood than the higher parts of the site. The area at the north end of the property at the bend contains both floodway and 100-and 500-year floodplain, and a narrow strip along the river on the western side where the greenway is located is also in regulated floodplain.

As stated in the FS/EA, the Rocky Ford Access site is capable of accommodating the new HQ/VCS in upland areas outside regulated floodplain. When site design takes place, the base flood elevations (BFE) will need to be surveyed and confirmed, and the HQ/VCS and other site improvements will need to be located outside the floodplain, other than the point at which the Greenway is integrated into the other site improvements.

The Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Marion County were updated in October 2008, and confirm that the entire Joseph McDowell House property is within a regulated floodplain. The lower elevation along the front of the property and at the very rear of the property is within the 100-year flood zone, and a portion of the middle rear of the property has been filled at some point in association with development on nearby properties and is within the 500-year floodplain. The FIRM maps show there is a break in the embankment behind the adjacent property to the east that would allow flood waters to inundate the area in front of the embankment.

2. Comment:

Two comments noted concerns about traffic access to the Rocky Ford Access site. The following comment was the most specific:

“A placement [of the HQ/VCS site] on the end at NC 18 access would perhaps have most traffic count. The four lane NC 18 existing divided roadway should be incorporated to direct traffic heading east from Morganton to cross the Catawba bridge and turn back left to return to the entry point using existing median turn lands cut to prevent accidents when crossing west bound traffic from the Lenoir area. As the medians are very wide, there would be little or no traffic back-up when crossing west traffic bound traffic [sic].”

Response:

Traffic and access to the site given traffic on NC 18 is a concern at the Rocky Ford Access site. The FS/EA states that acceleration and deceleration lanes might be necessary to ensure safety. NPS will work with appropriate agencies during the design period to ensure that the design accommodates safe ingress into and egress from the site. The specifics of how ingress and egress will be configured will be determined at that point.