

# **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

## **IMPROVEMENTS TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE FIFTH AVENUE AND MISSION STREET PROPERTY**

### **KOTZEBUE, ALASKA**

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) on improvements to NPS owned property located at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Mission Street in Kotzebue, Alaska (Lot 1A, Block 11, U.S. Survey 2082). The purpose of the project is to design and construct an employee housing and maintenance facility on the Fifth and Mission property to meet current and future needs for the Western Arctic National Parklands (WEAR). The following needs are not being adequately met by existing facilities on the site and within Kotzebue.

- WEAR is not able to provide suitable housing for the Kotzebue staff.
- There is no heated garage for vehicle maintenance.
- The current sanitary system at the Fifth Avenue and Mission Street property does not function adequately to cope with the facilities currently on the site.

The 2.61-acre site currently contains a shop, warehouse, bunkhouse, two fuel storage tanks, and ten conexes. Under the NPS preferred alternative, improvements and renovations will include building (or moving in prefabricated) two or three single family housing units, building two fourplex units, building a maintenance shop garage, relocate the existing bunkhouse away from Mission Street, relocate the current maintenance shop near the warehouse, building a new maintenance shop garage and building a new sewage lift station.

Each of the three single-family houses will be constructed on a 0.15-acre area of clean, compacted and leveled fill. The structures will be approximately 1,400 to 2,000 square feet and be on a piling system. They will be two or three bedroom and two bathrooms. The houses will be located on the west end of the site.

Each of the fourplex units will contain approximately four three-bedroom, 1.5 bath, approximately 1,500 square foot housing units, built to meet the arctic conditions. Each of the fourplex units will have approximately 3,000 square foot layout on the site and will be constructed on a 0.25-acre area of clean compacted and leveled fill. One of the fourplex units will be built in the current shop location. The additional fourplex unit will be located to the east of the bunkhouse. The fourplex units will be on a piling system.

The new 1,500 square foot maintenance shop garage will be of wood framing with a slab-on-grade foundation. The slab-on-grade is on a gravel pad with insulation and thermosyphons. The walls will be 2" x 6" wood construction and insulated with batt insulation and metal siding on the exterior with ½ " wood sheathing on the interior. The roof construction will be wood framed with metal roofing.

The 32 foot x 80 foot wood framed maintenance shop be moved to the west of the warehouse from the current location of the corner of Fifth Street and Mission Street. The building will be placed on a 0.25-acre area of clean, compacted and leveled fill with a piling system.

The new septic system will consist of a lift station located west of the bunkhouse with sewage piping to all housing units, transplanted maintenance shop and the new maintenance shop garage.

The existing driveway system will be enhanced during the improvements to the site. It is estimated that 2,000 cubic yards of clean gravel fill will be needed for the driveways and housing/maintenance shop pads.

Activities associated with the proposed improvements will begin in the summer of 2004 with the construction or moving-in of the two or three prefabrication homes. Additionally in late 2004 the NPS will relocate the bunkhouse and maintenance shop. Construction of the sewage lift station and moving of the maintenance shop will be scheduled to begin in the fall of 2004. The first fourplex will be constructed in 2005-2006 and the second fourplex construction will be constructed in 2006-2007.

All construction will comply with local and federal building code requirements including those pertaining to flood hazards. Emergency warning and evacuation procedures will be maintained.

### **Public Involvement**

The EA had a 30-day public comment period beginning June 16, 2003 and ending July 17, 2003. Public notice of the availability of the EA was published in the Arctic Sounder and posted on local bulletin boards. The EA was mailed to 6 agencies, organizations, and individuals. One organization, Maniilaq Association, commented on the EA. Maniilaq Association wrote a letter of support for the project with the stipulation that their support was for only the detailed improvements in the EA. The NPS responded to Maniilaq Association with the assurance that if any additional improvements were to occur on the site further compliance and public involvement would take place. No other comments were received on this project.

### **Alternatives**

The EA evaluated the no-action alternative in addition to the NPS preferred alternative. Under the no-action alternative the NPS would continue to use its existing facilities in the City of Kotzebue. There would be no expansion of existing facilities.

### **Mitigating Measures**

Mitigation to be taken in conjunction with implementing the NPS preferred alternative includes:

- Through groundbreaking activities (earthmoving, major landscaping, and geophysical or subsurface studies) the site will be visually inspected for evidence of any soil and/or groundwater contamination by pollutants, contaminants or hazardous substances. If contamination were encountered, appropriate notification and remedial action will be taken to ensure compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local government environmental statutes and regulations.
- Landscaping will incorporate native plants & grasses onto the site.

- The proposed site falls within the Kotzebue Archeological District. No historic structures are contained on the site. Additionally, archaeological investigations have revealed no sites and objects of significance within the general vicinity. While preliminary testing of the site did not yield much of significance, the proposed project will proceed in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA), as well as with consideration for all Native American Graves
- Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) regulations. If archeological resources are inadvertently encountered during any project on the site, contactors will take necessary steps to protect them and notify the Park Archeologist, at WEAR for appropriate mitigation of the cultural resource.
- The proposed development will meet all City of Kotzebue Planning and Land Use requirements. Parking for the housing units will meet Kotzebue parking guidelines for office and public assembly buildings.

### **Environmentally Preferred Alternative**

The "No Action Alternative" is the environmentally preferred alternative, because no further excavation or vegetation clearing would occur to improve the Fifth Avenue and Mission Street site. Therefore, this alternative would cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment.

### **Environmental Consequences of the NPS Preferred Alternative**

As documented in the EA, the NPS has determined that the NPS preferred alternative can be implemented with no significant adverse effect to natural or cultural resources. The effects of the NPS preferred alternative are presented below.

Earth moving and foundation work will be required under this proposal that could potentially disturb archeological resources. An archeological investigation of the site conducted during the summer of 2002 determined that projects on this property are expected to have no significant effect on cultural resources (NPS Archeological Survey 002-2002). In addition, WEAR will have an Archeologist on site during ground disturbing activities.

This proposal will minimally change the land use that the property is currently experiencing. The proposed action is not expected to affect Land Use Planning for the area and, in fact, will fulfill the City's land use plan for that area.

Vegetation will be impacted directly by the proposed improvements to the Fifth Street and Mission site, including the loss of 0.71 acres of wetlands. Although there is an impact through the loss of the wetland vegetation on the site, the city of Kotzebue is surrounded by hundreds of thousands of acres of intact, high quality, moist tundra vegetation, which is classified as wetland in Alaska (NPS 1994). Relative to the quantity and quality of wetlands surrounding Kotzebue the impact to 0.71 acres of marginal wetland is negligible.

NPS wetland protection procedures require a "Statement of Findings" to be written justifying any unavoidable impacts to wetlands. In addition, NPS policy generally requires wetland impact compensation if the adverse impacts on wetlands from the entire project total 0.1 acre or more.

There are no practicable alternatives that would avoid wetland impacts entirely. The NPS currently owns the 2.61-acre site within Kotzebue and has always intended to develop the site in some way. Other adequately sized properties potentially available for purchase within Kotzebue also contain wetlands. The wetlands contained on these other parcels are likely similar to or more intact and of higher value than the wetlands on the Fifth Avenue and Mission Street Site. The proposed compensation will remove contaminants from pristine wetlands located within a National Preserve providing safer and higher quality wetlands. The area of work far exceeds the 0.71 acres of wetlands to be impacted. This project is consistent with E.O. 11990 and NPS Director's Order #77-1.

Additionally, site development will include landscaping efforts that will enhance the vegetation currently found on parts of the property by introducing native grasses and other vegetation and providing conditions where they may be better able to thrive.

This preferred alternative is expected to have a positive impact on National Park operations by providing housing and maintenance facility space to meet staff and operational needs.

### **Decision**

The NPS has decided to select the NPS preferred alternative, which will involve the improvements to the Fifth Street and Mission Avenue site in Kotzebue, Alaska. The decision includes implementing mitigation measures identified in this FONSI.

### **Rationale for the decision**

Safe, comfortable, efficient and affordable housing for employees is necessary for the NPS to achieve its mission goals, particularly in Arctic communities where darkness and extreme winter temperatures force people to spend a great deal of time indoors. It is the goal of WEAR to improve inadequate housing through rehabilitation or replacement, and to effectively maintain adequate housing in order to help recruit and retain a professional, positive and productive staff. The preferred alternative will allow the NPS to meet this goal. The preferred alternative also will resolve on-going problems with a failed sewer system and will provide the NPS with the heated garage space necessary for vehicle maintenance.

Though the "No Action" alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative it was not selected for implementation because it would not meet the project's purpose and goals. The "No Action" alternative would also leave without the needed housing as outlined in the 2002 Housing Management Plan.

As indicated, the adverse impacts of improvements to the Fifth Street and Mission Avenue site will be negligible and will not result in an impairment of park resources that fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or that are key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park including the NPS Organic Act.

The NPS preferred alternative complies with the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and Executive Orders 11988, and 11990. Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands) requires all federal agencies to evaluate the likely impacts of proposed actions on wetlands. The objectives of Executive Order 11990 are to enhance and restore wetland values, avoid development in wetlands when practicable alternatives exist, and mitigate adverse impacts if a wetland will be occupied or modified. Executive Order 11990 is complied with as documented in the Wetlands Statement of Finding Improvements to the NPS Fifth Avenue and Mission Street Property, Kotzebue, Alaska found in appendix B of the EA and included with this FONSI. There will be no significant restriction of subsistence activities as documented by the National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Title 8, Section 810 (a) Summary Evaluation and Findings.

I find that the NPS preferred alternative does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for the project.

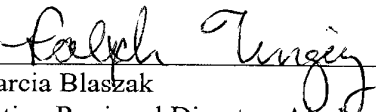
Recommended:



Lois Dalle-Molle  
Superintendent, Western Arctic National Parklands

7/21/03  
Date

Approved:

  
for Marcia Blaszk  
Acting Regional Director, Alaska

August 4, 2003  
Date