



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Capital Parks-East
1900 Anacostia Drive, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20020

IN REPLY REFER TO:

L76 (NCR-NACE/RM)

May 28, 2012

Dear Sir or Madam:

The National Park Service (NPS) announces the availability of the Development of Energy Efficient Visitor and Student Educational Facilities at the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Hard Bargain Farm Environment Center in the Scenic Easement of Piscataway Park Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review and comment.

The NPS is proposing to support the Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF), a not-for-profit organization and NPS cooperator, by providing support in the planning effort, to perform several capital improvement projects and repairs on various structures on property they own within the scenic easements of Piscataway Park through this EA. The project would improve facilities and accommodations for existing and growing visitor and program needs at the AFF by constructing new classrooms, new overnight facilities, a new wetland boardwalk, and other support facilities at the Hard Bargain Farm Environment Center.

The AFF brings over 8,000 school students and educators yearly to Piscataway Park for environmental field studies and investigations. Conditions of the scenic easement between the AFF and the NPS require written approval of the Regional Director of the National Capital Region of the NPS prior to the construction of additional buildings, structures, or other physical facilities on the AFF property. It is this NPS approval that triggers compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and implementing regulations 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, and NPS Director's Order #12 and Handbook, Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-Making (DO-12). Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 is occurring in parallel with the NEPA process.

The action is needed because current facilities are in need of upgrades and improvement to meet current and anticipated visitor and program needs. Moreover, the AFF Overnight Lodge (currently the Wareham Lodge), where students stay overnight in extended programs, needs to be replaced due to persistent moisture and mold problems. Temporary mold remediation has enabled the programs to continue at expense to the AFF. Day-use programs use a facility on an adjoining property that is not under the ownership or control of AFF, which exposes the AFF to both uncertainty about the future viability of the programs and potential liability issues, both of which the AFF hopes to eliminate. The new facilities would address the inadequacies and health issues that have surfaced in the current overnight Wareham Lodge and the off-site day-use pavilion.

The Draft EA analyzed the impacts that would result from the implementation of two alternatives, including the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative (Alternative A) serves as the baseline by which all other alternatives are compared. Under the No Action alternative, there would be no new development at the AFF's Hard Bargain Farm Environment Center beyond routine repairs and/or cyclic maintenance activities and/or upgrades.

The no action alternative assumes that visitor use for the AFF facilities currently found on the site would continue into the future. However, there may be reduction, and/or lack of improvement of certain programs due to existing problems (i.e. cancellation of the overnight experience due to high moisture and mold issues).

Under the preferred alternative, Alternative B, the NPS would support the new development proposed by AFF, ensuring such changes do not adversely impact the historic views, cultural or natural resources that Piscataway Park was established by the U.S. Congress to preserve. Actions would include:

- Constructing the new Grass Building (3,457 square feet) and associated facilities (i.e. decks, walkways, etc.).
- Constructing the new Moss Building area (11,523 square feet), and associated facilities (i.e. decks, cabins, etc.)
- Construct a wetland boardwalk, replacing an old trail, through the former pasture (wet meadow). This would include bridging the adjacent Accokeek Creek (a bridge from the previous trails, which is in disrepair, currently exists).
- Construct new parking areas, walkways, utilities, etc., that would support the new Grass and Moss building projects.

In keeping with the AFF's environmental mission, the Living Buildings would make use of the sun, wind, and rain – and to conserve resources for others and for the future. Through these green facilities, students, teachers and visitors would experience numerous examples of the sustainable engineering and partnership with the natural world.

Access to the Document:

Public review copies of the Draft EA will be available at the following locations:

Accokeek Foundation Visitor Center
3400 Bryan Point Road
Accokeek, MD 20607

National Capital Parks-East Headquarters
1900 Anacostia Drive, SE
Washington, D.C. 20020

Moyaone Community Center
2311 Bryan Point Road
Accokeek, MD 20607

Accokeek Branch Library
15773 Livingston Road
Accokeek, MD 20607

Available electronically at:

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/hard_bargain_farm

Mailed directly to:

National Capital Parks-East
Alexcy Romero, Superintendent
Re: Alice Ferguson Foundation Living Buildings Draft EA
1900 Anacostia Drive SE
Washington, D.C. 20020

Note to Reviewers and Respondents:

If you wish to comment on the Draft EA, you may submit them electronically or mail comments directly. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.


Comments on the Development of Energy Efficient Visitor and Student Educational Facilities at the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Hard Bargain Farm Environment Center in the Scenic Easement of Piscataway Park Draft Environmental Assessment may be submitted on-line by following the appropriate links at *(The NPS preferred method of receiving comments)*:

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/hard_bargain_farm

Comments on the Draft EA will be accepted through June 27, 2012.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this process.

Sincerely,



Alexcy Romero
Superintendent