



**Ocmulgee National Monument**

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**Finding of No Significant Impact for Granting a Special Use Permit to  
Macon-Bibb County for the Implementation of Georgia Department of  
Transportation Project CSTE-0008-00(986), PI #0008986**

**September 2015**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Project CSTE-0008-00(986), PI # 0008986; and this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) constitute the record of the environmental impact analysis and decision-making process for granting a Special Use Permit to Macon-Bibb County to access park property from the Ocmulgee National Monument to construct a trail extension of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail into the Ocmulgee National Monument. The National Park Service (NPS) has approved the selection of the Build Alternative identified in the EA. Macon-Bibb County will construct an approximately 6,500-foot extension of the existing Heritage Trail. This FONSI summarizes the findings of the EA and incorporates the public input provided during the public comment period from April 17, 2014 to May 2, 2014.

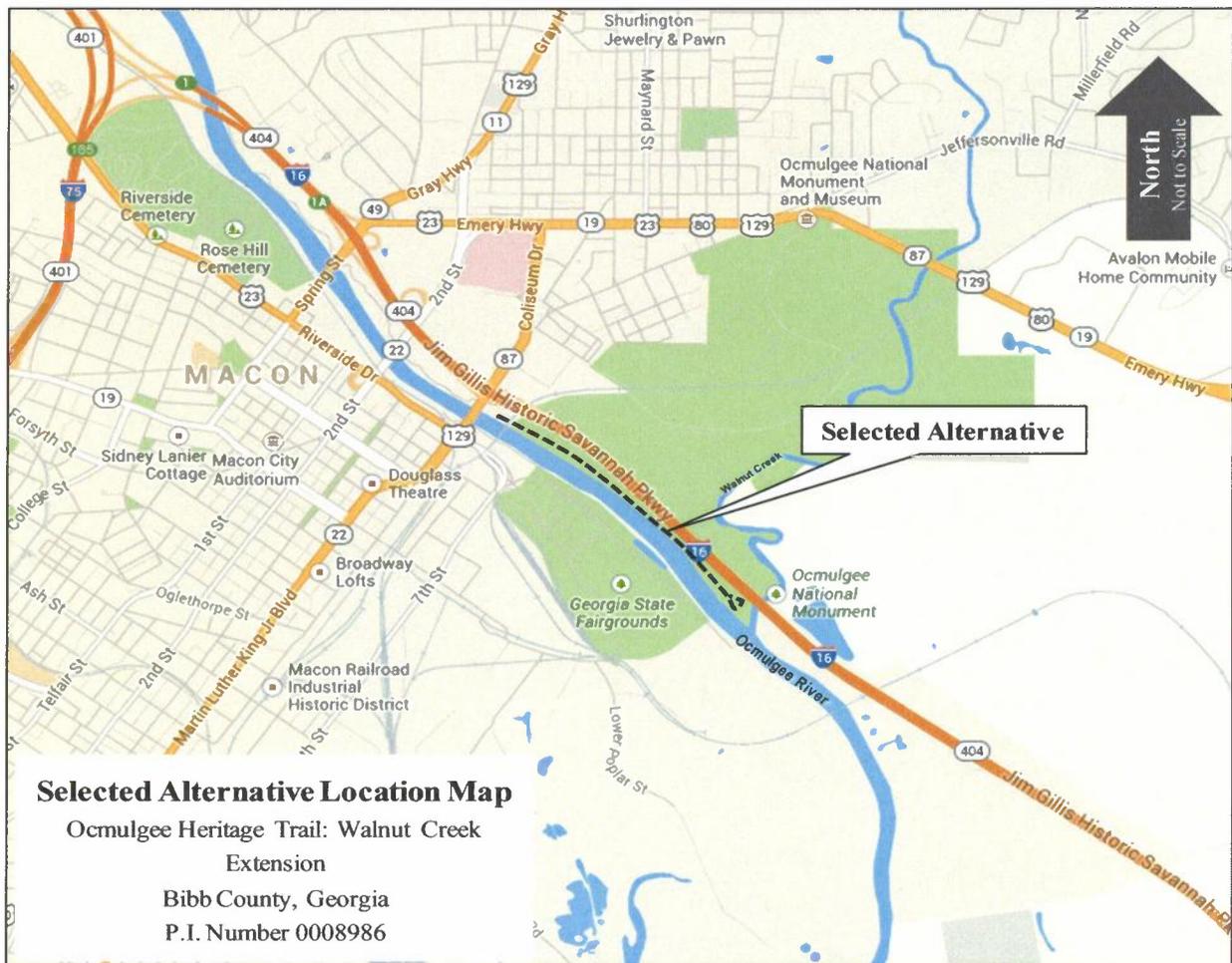
**BACKGROUND**

The OCMU is located on the eastern edge of the City of Macon in central Georgia, is open year-round, and in 2005 to 2009 received an average of 119,670 visitors annually. The park encompasses 700 acres and contains approximately five miles of walking and biking trails. The purpose of the project is to improve visitor access and use in the southwestern portion of the OCMU by connecting the Otis Redding Loop Trail of the Heritage Trail to the existing Ocmulgee National Monument trail system.

**SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

The Selected alternate is the proposed construction of an approximate 6,949-foot extension of the Heritage Trail between the Ocmulgee River and I-16, which connects to the existing Monument Trail near Walnut Creek. Approximately one mile of the trail would be located within the

Ocmulgee National Monument. The remaining section of the trail, near Otis Redding Bridge, would be constructed on land jointly owned by the City of Macon and Norfolk Southern Railroad Company, with easements granted to Georgia Power Company and Macon Water Authority. The proposed project would consist of a 10-foot wide trail beginning approximately 950 feet east of the Otis Redding Bridge and terminating approximately 670 feet from the intersection of Walnut Creek and the Ocmulgee River at the existing Monument Trail. The meandering trail would remain between 30 and 100 feet from the bank of the Ocmulgee River to avoid impacts to the 25-foot vegetated stream buffer along the Ocmulgee River. One 60-foot long footbridge would be constructed over Stream 1 and a culvert would be constructed at the crossing of Wetland 1. A canopy would be constructed over the proposed trail and under the existing Norfolk southern Railroad trestle to allow track and trestle maintenance on the railroad in concurrence with trail usage below.



### OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the Selected Alternative, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), GDOT, Macon-Bibb County, and the NPS considered and rejected an alternative which would construct

the proposed trail within the 25-foot vegetated stream buffer along the Ocmulgee River. This alternative was not advanced because of the impacts to the environmentally sensitive area.

### **ENVIRONMENTALLY SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

The environmentally selected alternative is determined by applying the criteria from Section 2.7 (D) of NPS Director's Order 12. This is also the criteria laid out by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations that state, "...the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will best promote the national environmental policy as expressed in Section 101(b) of NEPA". This alternative will have the least impact to the biological and physical environment while preserving historic, cultural, and natural resources. The Selected Alternative is the alternative that best meets the need to improve visitor access while meeting NPS environmental policies and minimizing impacts to the Ocmulgee National Monument.

### **THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA**

The Selected Alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. This conclusion is based on the following examination of the significance criteria as defined in 40 CFR §1508.27.

***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).***

There will be no significant impacts as a result of implementing the Selected Alternative. The environmental impacts will be nonexistent, negligible or minor for environmental resources including Cultural Resources; Water Quality; Waters of the U.S., State Waters, and NPS Wetlands; Floodplains; Farmlands; Protected Species; Wildlife Habitat; Invasive Species; Noise and Air; Visitor Use and Experience/Recreation; Visual Resources; Park Operations; Soils; Vegetation; and Wildlife. Effects from the Selected Alternative to the resources as analyzed in the EA are described below.

Cultural Resources (Historic and Archaeological): In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the Archaeological Resource Protection Act, formal consultation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) was completed by correspondence dated April 29, 2010. The Selected Alternative would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on any of the historic resources identified within the area of potential effect. The Selected Alternative would have no direct, indirect or cumulative effects on the identified archaeological resource since the footers for the proposed footbridge do not extend more than 5.5 feet below the existing ground surface.

Farmlands: The Selected Alternative would not cause direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to farmland as defined in the Farmland Protection Policy Act.

Floodplains: The Selected Alternative will predominantly match existing grades, therefore expected direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to floodplains would be negligible or minor.

Invasive Species: The Selected Alternative involves removal of some invasive species infestations during construction.

Noise and Air: The project would have minor direct and cumulative noise and air effects, and no indirect noise and air effects as a result of the construction activities.

Park Operations: The Selected Alternative would have minor direct effects on park operations since additional budget would be required for trail maintenance. There would be no indirect or cumulative effects on park operations.

Protected Species: There would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to protected species due to lack of species individuals and their habitat in the project area.

Soils: As a result of soil disturbance during construction the Selected Alternative would have minor effects on soils. There would be no indirect or cumulative effects.

Vegetation: The Selected Alternative would have minor direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the vegetation within the project area. The vegetation to be removed is considered low quality and would be replaced with native species.

Visitor Use and Experience/Recreation: The Selected Alternative would constitute an improvement to visitor use and experience/recreation as it would allow access to the southwest portion of the Ocmulgee National Monument. The direct and cumulative effects would be minor and beneficial due to the introduction of a new trail segment connecting exiting trails. No direct effects would be expected.

Visual Resources: Construction of the Selected Alternative would create more opportunities for users of the park to appreciate the visual resources. This would result in minor direct and cumulative beneficial effects on visual resources. No indirect effects are expected.

Waters of the U.S., State Waters, and NPS Wetlands: Implementation of the Selected Alternative would result in negligible to minor impacts to Waters of the U.S., State Waters, and NPS Wetlands. No indirect or cumulative impacts would occur to State Waters. There would be negligible or minor indirect and cumulative impacts to Waters of the U.S. and NPS Wetlands. Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be in place to minimize work in and around the streams and wetlands.

Water Quality: No significant impacts to the water quality in the project area are expected to occur as a result of the proposed project. BMPs will be placed in the contract to exercise every reasonable precaution during construction to prevent pollution of streams in the vicinity of the project area.

Wildlife: The Selected Alternative would alter existing wildlife habitat due to vegetation clearing and trail construction; however, the small amount of wildlife habitat in the project area is poor quality. This would be negligible and possibly beneficial direct effects to the wildlife habitat. There are no indirect or cumulative effects expected.

***The degree to which public health and safety are affected.***

Minor beneficial impacts to public health and safety will occur with the expansion of the trail network available to park visitors.

***Any unique characteristics of the area (proximity to historic or cultural resources, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, wetlands or floodplains, and so forth).***

The environmental effects of the Selected Alternative will not have significant effects on historic or cultural resources, ecologically critical areas, wetlands, or floodplains. There are no wild and scenic rivers in the project area. There are six historic and one archaeological National Register listed resources in the project area: Macon Railroad Industrial District; Central City Park Bandstand; Luther Williams Field; Ocmulgee National Monument; Railroad Overpass at Ocmulgee; Central of Georgia Railroad Bridge; and Ocmulgee Bottoms site.

***The degree to which impacts are likely to be highly controversial.***

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not controversial. Although there will be temporary construction activities within the Ocmulgee National Monument that could be an inconvenience to visitors, the construction will take place in an area of the park that does not currently readily provide visitor access. Public comments received were in support of the proposed trail expansion.

***The degree to which the potential impacts are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.***

There are no highly uncertain impacts to the human environment from the Selected Alternative. Unique or unknown risks are not expected.

***Whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.***

The Selected Alternative will not establish a precedent since it will expand the trail network by connecting to existing trails.

***Whether the action is related to other actions that may have individual insignificant impacts but cumulatively significant effects. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or breaking it down into small component parts.***

The actions associated with the Selected Alternative will not significantly contribute to cumulative impacts of any of the environmental impact topics evaluated. The environmental cumulative impacts will be negligible or minor for environmental impacts including Cultural Resources; Water Quality; Waters of the US, State Waters and NPS Wetlands; Floodplains; Farmlands; Protected Species; Invasive Species; Noise and Air; Visitor Use and Experience/Recreation; Visual Resources; Park Operations; Soils; Vegetation; and Wildlife.

***The degree to which the action may adversely affect historic properties in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other significant scientific, archeological, or cultural resources.***

The Selected Alternative will have no adverse effect on historic resources. Concurrence from the SHPO was received on April 29, 2010. There will be no adverse effect on archaeological resources since the proposed footbridge does not require footers deeper than 5.5 feet. Concurrence from SHPO on this finding was received on December 18, 2009.

***The degree to which an action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat.***

The Selected Alternative will not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or habitat due to lack of species individuals and their habitat in the project area. The FHWA concurred with this determination on June 5, 2015.

***Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.***

The Selected Alternative will not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

## **MITIGATION MEASURES AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

Mitigation measures and Best Management Practices are specific actions that when implemented avoid or reduce environmental impacts, and protect park resources and visitors. The following would be implemented:

1. **Effects on hydrology and fluvial processes:** Action must have only negligible to minor, new adverse effects on site hydrology and fluvial processes, including flow, circulation,

- velocities, hydro periods, water level fluctuations, sediment transport, channel morphology, and so on. Care must be taken to avoid any rutting caused by vehicles or equipment.
2. **Effects on fauna:** Action must have only negligible to minor, new adverse effects on normal movement, migration, reproduction, or health of aquatic or terrestrial fauna, including at low flow conditions.
  3. **Water quality protection and certification:** Action is conducted so as to avoid degrading water quality to the maximum extent practicable. Measures must be employed to prevent or control spills of fuels, lubricants, or other contaminants from entering the waterway or wetland. Action is consistent with state water quality standards and Clean Water Act Section 401 certification requirements (check with appropriate state agency).
  4. **Erosion and siltation controls:** Appropriate erosion and siltation controls must be maintained during construction, and all exposed soil or fill material must be permanently stabilized at the earliest practicable date.
  5. **Proper maintenance:** Structure or fill must be properly maintained so as to avoid adverse impacts on aquatic environments or public safety.
  6. **Heavy equipment use:** Heavy equipment use in wetlands must be avoided if at all possible. Heavy equipment used in wetlands must be placed on mats, or other measures must be taken to minimize soil and plant root disturbance and to preserve preconstruction elevations.
  7. **Stockpiling material:** Whenever possible, excavated material must be placed on an upland site. However, when this is not feasible, temporary stockpiling of excavated material in wetlands must be placed on filter cloth, mats, or some other semi-permeable surface, or comparable measures must be taken to ensure that underlying wetland habitat is protected. The material must be stabilized with straw bales, filter cloth, or other appropriate means to prevent reentry into the waterway or wetland.
  8. **Removal of stockpiles and other temporary disturbances during construction:** Temporary stockpiles in wetlands must be removed in their entirety as soon as practicable. Wetland areas temporarily disturbed by stockpiling or other activities during construction must be returned to their pre-existing elevations, and soil, hydrology, and native vegetation communities must be restored as soon as practicable.
  9. **Topsoil storage and reuse:** Re-vegetation of disturbed soil areas should be facilitated by salvaging and storing existing topsoil and reusing it in restoration efforts in accordance with NPS policies and guidance. Topsoil storage must be for as short a time as possible to prevent loss of seed and root viability, loss of organic matter, and degradation of the soil microbial community.
  10. **Native plants:** Where plantings or seeding are required, native plant material must be obtained and used in accordance with NPS policies and guidance. Management techniques must be implemented to foster rapid development of target native plant communities and to eliminate invasion by exotic or other undesirable species.
  11. **Boardwalk elevations:** Minimizing shade impacts, to the extent practicable, should be a consideration in designing boardwalks and similar structures. (Placing a boardwalk at an

elevation above the vegetation surface at least equal to the width of the boardwalk is one way to minimize shading.)

12. **Wild and Scenic Rivers:** If the action qualifies as a water resources project pursuant to Section 7(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, then appropriate project review and documentation requirements under Section 7 ( a) are required.
13. **Endangered species:** Action must not jeopardize the continued existence of a threatened or endangered species or a species proposed for such designation; including degradation of critical habitat (see NPS Management Policies 2006 and guidance on threatened and endangered species).
14. **Historic properties:** Action must not have adverse effects on historic properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Project coordination meetings have been held throughout the project development process with representatives from Macon-Bibb County, the GDOT, the NPS, and the FHWA in attendance. These coordination meetings were held on March 4, 2008; May 12, 2010; May 19, 2010; April 5, 2012; and April 12, 2012. Additionally, one Public Hearing Open House was held on April 17, 2014 at the Ocmulgee National Monument Visitor Center. The meeting was advertised in the local Macon newspaper, on signage near the Ocmulgee National Monument main entrance, and on flyers displayed at the Ocmulgee National Monument Visitor Center front desk. The public comment period was from April 17, 2014 to May 2, 2014. The meeting drew a total of 8 people and generated a total of 5 comments. Commenters expressed overall support for the project with some questions about the trail surface accommodating bicycles and whether the new trail would allow homeless people to access the park after hours. Responses to these comments can be found in Appendix A Errata.

**CONCLUSION**

The Selected Alternative will not have a significant effect, either adverse or beneficial, to the human environment. Adverse impacts will not exceed the moderate level, and will be mitigated to the extent possible during construction. The FHWA EA provides a thorough analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed action is not required.

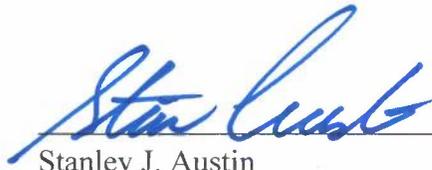
The NPS has determined that the level of analysis in the EA meets the requirements set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act to assess the impacts of the proposed action. The Finding of No Significant Impact is based on review of the EA and consideration of the impacts and effects of the proposed action.

Recommended:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jim David  
Superintendent  
Ocmulgee National Monument

9/14/15  
Date

Approved:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Stanley J. Austin  
Regional Director, Southeast Region  
National Park Service

9/14/15  
Date

## APPENDIX A

### ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL

#### ERRATA

As required by National Park Service (NPS) Director's Order 12, the following errata sheets respond to all substantive comments submitted on the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail.

Substantive comments from various individuals and organizations have been consolidated and paraphrased for purposes of this document. The comments, with NPS' responses, are set forth below.

A Public Hearing Open House (PHOH) was held on April 17, 2014 from 5:00 pm until 7:00 pm at the Ocmulgee National Monument Visitor Center, 1207 Emery Highway, Macon, Georgia 31217. In preparation for this meeting a sign advertising the meeting was placed at the park entrance to the Ocmulgee National Monument; an advertisement was published in the local paper on March 18, 2014 and April 10, 2014; and flyers advertising the meeting date and location were displayed at the Ocmulgee National Monument Visitor Center front desk. The public comment period was from April 17, 2014 through May 2, 2014.

A total of 8 people attended the PHOH. From those attending 5 comment cards were received at the meeting. No other comments were received during the comment period following the PHOH. Of the 5 respondents who formally commented, 5 were in support of the project. There were no respondents who were opposed, uncommitted, or expressed conditional support of the project.

The following substantive concerns were expressed and the associated responses were provided:

- *Homeless people might try to enter the park after closing from the point where the proposed Ocmulgee Heritage Trail meets the existing River Trail.*

Response: The National Park Service has examined this access issue and determined that it will not be a problem. It is over two miles between the start of the proposed trail and the Great Temple mound and there are other access points to the mound that are less than half that distance. Further, there is an existing gate on the River Trail that could be closed if access and/or vandalism become an issue. Therefore, the National Park Service does not think there is a security issue.

- *I enjoy using the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail and look forward to its expansion.*

Response: We hope you continue to enjoy the trail, including the approximate 1.23 mile extension.

- *What a great idea!*

Response: Thank you. We hope you enjoy the extension.

- *I hope the trail will be paved in such a way as to accommodate bicycles.*

Response: The trail will be paved with concrete, asphalt, or other Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant surface material, depending upon the available budget. These materials will accommodate bicycles as well.

## APPENDIX B

### NPS NON-IMPAIRMENT DETERMINATION

#### **Why is a Non-Impairment Determination Required:**

Section 1.4.7 of *NPS Management Policies 2006* states that:

[b]efore approving a proposed action that could lead to an impairment of park resources and values, an NPS decision-maker must consider the impacts of the proposed action and determine, in writing, that the activity will not lead to an impairment of park resources and values.

Actions that require preparation of EAs and EISs constitute actions that may have the potential to impair park resources or values. Therefore, a non-impairment determination must be made for any action selected in a FONSI or ROD that could impact park resources and values and to which the NPS is a signatory. The non-impairment determination is completed only for the selected action.

#### **What is Impairment?**

Sections 1.4.5 and 1.4.6 of *Management Policies 2006* provide an explanation of impairment. Section 1.4.5 defines impairment as:

an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values.

Section 1.4.5 goes on to state that:

[a]n impact to any park resource or value may, but does not necessarily, constitute impairment. An impact would be more likely to constitute impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or value whose conservation is:

- Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park
- Key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park, or

- Identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance.

An impact would be less likely to constitute an impairment if it is an unavoidable result of an action necessary to preserve or restore the integrity of park resources or values and it cannot be further mitigated.

Section 1.4.6 of *Management Policies 2006* identifies the park resources and values that are subject to the no-impairment standard:

The 'park resources and values' that are subject to the no-impairment standard include:

- the park's scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife, and the processes and condition that sustain them, including, to the extent present in the park: the ecological, biological, and physical processes that created the park and continue to act upon it; scenic features; natural visibility, both in daytime and at night; natural landscapes; natural soundscapes and smells; water and air resources; soils; geological resources; paleontological resources; archeological resources; cultural landscapes; ethnographic resources; historic and prehistoric sites, structure, and objects; museum collections; and native plants and animals;
- appropriate opportunities to experience enjoyment of the above resources, to the extent that can be done without impairing them;
- the park's role in contributing to the national dignity, the high public value and integrity, and the superlative environmental quality of the national park system, and the benefit and inspiration provided to the American people by the national park system; and
- any additional attributes encompassed by the specific values and purposes for which the park was established.

### **How is a Non-Impairment Determination Made?**

Section 1.4.7 of *Management Policies 2006* states that

"[i]n making a determination of whether there would be an impairment, an NPS decision maker must use his or her professional judgment. This means that the decision-maker must consider any environmental assessments or environmental impact statements required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA); consultations

required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA); relevant scientific and scholarly studies; advice or insights offered by subject matter experts and others who have relevant knowledge or experience; and the results of civic engagement and public involvement activities relating to the decision.

*Management Policies 2006* further define "professional judgment" as

"a decision or opinion that is shaped by study and analysis and full consideration of all the relevant facts, and that takes into account the decision-maker's education, training, and experience; advice or insights offered by subject matter experts and others who have relevant knowledge and experience; good science and scholarship; and, whenever appropriate, the results of civic engagement and public involvement activities relation to the decision.

### **How is a Written Non-Impairment Determination Prepared?**

This determination on impairment has been prepared for the Selected Alternative described on pages 5, 6, 7, and 8 of the EA. An impairment determination is made for all resource impact topics analyzed for the Selected Alternative. An impairment determination is not made for environmental justice, park operations, public health and safety, recreation, and visitor use and experience, because impairment findings relate back to park resources and values, and these impact areas are not generally considered to be park resources or values according to the Organic Act, and cannot be impaired in the same way that an action can impair park resources and values.

Cultural Resources (Historic and Archaeological): The Selected Alternative will have no adverse effect on historic resources. Concurrence from the SHPO was received on April 29, 2010. There will be no adverse effect on archaeological resources as long as the proposed footbridge does not require footers deeper than 5.5 feet. Concurrence from SHPO on this finding was received on December 18, 2009. If cultural artifacts are discovered during construction the NPS and the SHPO will be notified immediately. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Water Quality: No significant impacts to the water quality in the project area are expected to occur as a result of the proposed project. Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be placed in the construction contract to exercise every reasonable precaution during construction to prevent pollution of streams in the vicinity of the project area. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Water of the U.S., State Waters, and NPS Wetlands: Implementation of the Selected Alternative would result in minor impacts to Waters of the US, State Waters, and NPS Wetlands. BMPs

would be in place to minimize work in and around the streams and wetlands. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Floodplains: The Selected Alternative will predominantly match existing grades; therefore expected impacts to floodplains would be negligible or minor. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Farmlands: The Selected Alternative would not cause impacts to farmland as defined in the Farmland Protection Policy Act. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Protected Species: There would be no effects to protected species due to lack of species individuals and their habitat in the project area. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Noise and Air: The project would have minor noise and air effects as a result of the construction activities, but these are short term activities. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Visual Resources: Construction of the Selected Alternative would create more opportunities for users of the park to appreciate the visual resources. This would result in minor beneficial effects on visual resources. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Soils: As a result of soil disturbance during construction the Selected Alternative would have minor temporary effects on soils. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Vegetation: The Selected Alternative would have minor effects on the vegetation within the project area; however the vegetation to be removed is considered low quality and would be replaced with native species. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.

Wildlife: The Selected Alternative would alter existing wildlife habitat due to vegetation clearing and trail construction, however the small amount of wildlife habitat in the project area is poor quality. This would be a negligible and possibly beneficial effect to the wildlife habitat. There will be no impairment to park resources from implementation of the Selected Alternative.