

CHAPTER 1 PURPOSE AND NEED

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

On September 29, 2006, the National Park Service (NPS) acquired four historic structures associated with the Johnstown Flood of 1889 that claimed 2,209 lives, destroyed more than 1,600 homes, and caused more than \$17 million in damage. The structures, acquired through donation from the Friends of the Johnstown Flood National Memorial (the Friends), are the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Clubhouse, the Clubhouse Annex, the Brown Cottage, and the Moorhead Cottage. All structures are located in the village of St. Michael in Cambria County, Pennsylvania. The proposed Federal action is to determine an appropriate adaptive re-use of these structures in order to preserve, protect, manage and maintain them to more accurately depict the story of the events leading up to and after the flood.

The need to permanently preserve these structures is based on their significant contribution to the story of the Johnstown Flood. These structures can be used by the NPS and the Friends to interpret the events that led to the historic Johnstown Flood of 1889 and the responses of the club members following the tragic event. Without proper climate control systems, heating and ventilating systems, and maintenance, the condition of these structures will be jeopardized and their condition will continue to decline. Preservation and adaptive re-use of these structures by the National Park Service will enable a more comprehensive interpretation of the events before and after the flood and the actions and roles of club members.

This environmental assessment has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (P.L. 91-190) and implementing regulations at 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508; National Park Service Director's Order No. 12 and Handbook, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making*.

Purpose and Significance of the Park

On August 31, 1964, Congress enacted P.L. 88-546 (78 Stat.752), which provided for the establishment of the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site and the Johnstown Flood National Memorial (NMem). The purpose of the Johnstown Flood NMem is to commemorate the Johnstown Flood of 1889 and to preserve the remains of the South Fork Dam, which failed during the flood disaster that occurred on May 31, 1889. This disaster represented the most notable flood of the nineteenth century in the United States and the greatest national tragedy of the post-Civil War era. The Johnstown Flood was the first major disaster relief effort handled by the new American Red Cross, led by Clara Barton.

On October 5, 2004, Congress passed P.L. 108-313 (118 Stat. 1196), the *Johnstown Flood National Memorial Boundary Adjustment Act of 2004*. This act modified the boundary of the memorial, allowing additional lands to be included within the park boundary. The intent of this act was to permanently protect the resources that are integral to the historic flood of 1889. By revising the park boundary and acquiring these resources for inclusion within the park's boundary, NPS fulfills its role as steward of these irreplaceable historic resources.

Based on the enabling legislation, the objectives of the proposed action are to—

- Fulfill the intent of the enabling legislation (P.L. 108-313);
- More accurately depict the story of the events leading up to and after the Johnstown Flood of 1889;

- Determine adaptable re-use of these historic resources that enables the NPS to interpret the events of the Great Flood, as well as the responses of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club members to the flood and its aftermath; and
- Preserve, protect and maintain the historic structures unimpaired for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of future generations

Under this act, NPS would be able to acquire land within this modified boundary from willing sellers or through donation. The structures that are the subject of this environmental assessment have been donated to the NPS by the Friends of the Johnstown Flood National Memorial, formerly the 1889 South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Historical Preservation Society. Based on the legislative intent of the boundary expansion, the Clubhouse is considered among the most significant historical structures not only to the story of the Johnstown Flood, but to the region as well.¹

Based on the Historic Structures Report (HSR) prepared in 1993, these structures represent 4 of the 16 principal buildings believed to have been located on the more than 600-acre, Club-owned property. In one context, the Clubhouse is significant as it was the former exclusive rural retreat of influential individuals engaged in the industrial and related development of the region, as well as the nation. Business relationships were developed and nurtured among Pittsburgh's most prominent business leaders at South Fork, while recreation and leisure activities were enjoyed by these business leaders and their families. The Clubhouse and its property were connected to the events that occurred during and after the Johnstown Flood, as many of the Club members participated in the relief efforts during and after the flood events.²

Architecturally, the subject buildings represent good examples of the regional architecture. The Clubhouse, while a less sophisticated exterior design is representative of club architecture typical of the 1880s, of which few examples exist today in the area. The Moorhead Cottage and the Brown Cottage are fine examples of Queen Anne/Shingle Style and Stick Style architecture, respectively. These cottages derive further significance through association with St. Michael's development as a company town for the Maryland Coal Company and subsequently for the Berwind-White Coal Mining Company. In their existing altered, duplex form, the cottages typify housing conditions of the period that were provided by the coal companies to their employees.³

Project Background

Previous Planning

A number of studies have been conducted in support of this study that provide guidance in planning for and managing existing and proposed activities, as well as help evaluate conditions for proper resource management. The following planning studies were used in preparing this environmental assessment:

- *General Management Plan Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site Johnstown Flood National Memorial Pennsylvania*, August 1980, amended 1991
- *Statement for Management*, November 1992, revised April 1993
- Superintendent's Compendium, 2004

¹ Comments from Congressman John Murtha, 12th Congressional District. Oct. 15, 2003. <http://www.house.gov/murtha/news/nw031015.htm>

² Landmarks Design Associates, Architects and Wallace, Roberts & Todd. *Historic Structures Report Architectural & Historical Data Section, Clubhouse, Brown Cottage, Moorhead Cottage, Clubhouse Annex, South Fork Fish & Hunting Club, St. Michael, Pennsylvania*, pp. 7-8.

³ Ibid.

- *Johnstown Flood National Memorial Alternative Transportation Study, Final*
- *Johnstown Flood National Memorial Visitor Study, Final*
- *Johnstown Flood National Memorial Draft Boundary Study and Environmental Assessment*
- *Phase I, II, and III Archaeological Investigations of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Clubhouse and Phase I Investigations at the Moorhead Cottage, St. Michael, Pennsylvania, Draft*
- *Historic Structures Report Architectural & Historical Data Section, Clubhouse, Brown Cottage, Moorhead Cottage, Clubhouse Annex, South Fork Fish & Hunting Club, St. Michael, Pennsylvania*
- *Johnstown Flood National Memorial, Visitor Survey, Summer 2005, Final*
- *Cost/Benefit Analysis for the Environmental Assessment of the Adaptive Re-use of the 1889 Clubhouse and Associated Cottages at the Johnstown Flood National Memorial, Final*
- Draft Environmental Screening Sheet prepared for Johnstown Flood National Memorial. Project Title: "Create Black Box Theater."
- *Level I Pre-Acquisition Environmental Site Assessment Survey, Johnstown Flood National Memorial*

Scoping

Scoping is the early solicitation and open exchange of information with agencies and the public concerning the project. A notice announcing the public scoping meeting was published in *The Tribune-Democrat* on June 6, 2006. Approximately 140 letters were mailed to Federal, State and local officials; newspapers; school districts and libraries; emergency services; State parks; and local nonprofit organizations, including members of the Johnstown Area Heritage Association, inviting them to attend agency and public scoping meetings on June 13, 2006.

Agency Scoping Meeting. NPS conducted an agency scoping meeting at the Lemon House, Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, on the morning of June 13, 2006. Seven people attended including representatives from Saint Francis University, State Senator Wozniak's office, the Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission, the Pennsylvania State Police, and park staff.

The purpose and intent of the scoping meeting and its goals were discussed. The group was polled concerning any projects or plans proposed or underway that could possibly affect St. Michael and the area where the structures are located. The park explained the studies that have been conducted on the structures and the area, and explained that an archaeological survey was being conducted behind the Clubhouse.

Information was requested on fire/police/ambulance response and the pertinent response districts. Adams Township has their own police department, which would respond to emergencies, and St. Michael has a volunteer fire department located a short distance from the historic district.

The Superintendent described the proposed project and explained that uses for the Clubhouse, the Clubhouse Annex, Moorhead Cottage and Brown Cottage will be evaluated in the environmental assessment. There are overwhelming costs associated with rehabilitating the structures and limited NPS financial resources to achieve this project. Two alternatives were presented: 1) No Action Alternative, which assesses existing conditions, and 2) Re-use of the Structures, which addresses a broad range of uses. Alternative 2 will evaluate restoration or leasing of all or part of the structures depending upon availability of funding.

Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAPDC) expressed interest in re-use of the structures that would be tourism-related. The Clubhouse could be used for interpretation of the flood and the Moorhead Cottage could be used as an interpretive facility and place to bring tourists to visit. The issues of motorcoach access and parking were raised. The streets are narrow and there is no turnaround for vehicles on Cottage Street, where Brown and Moorhead Cottages are located. Motorcoaches usually continue to idle their engines while the visitors are touring, which can create problems associated with air emissions and noise disturbance to local residents. There is no parking or circulation at the Brown or Moorhead Cottages. The streets are wide enough for buses, and school buses are another source of transportation to the area. NPS would be interested in acquiring the right-of-way to an ally located behind Brown and Moorhead Cottages. The park staff mentioned that there is a buffer zone owned by NPS that might be able to be used for bus parking, depending on the site's topography.

Zoning exists in the area and any changes to the structures would need to be reviewed by the Historic Architecture Review Committee.

The park was asked if it was looking for businesses in the Clubhouse and if the park would provide for a "build to suit lessee."

An idea was offered to use the Clubhouse as an arts academy to educate young people in a wide range of the arts. Funding from community foundations and from Berwind Coal was mentioned as a means of supporting the project.

Planning for the Johnstown Flood Trail project has been initiated by the Forest Hills Regional Alliance. This proposed pedestrian trail will extend from Sidman through the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Historic District in St. Michael and will eventually link to the Path of the Flood Trail near South Fork. Motorcoaches could also be used to connect historic sites and memorials throughout the area. There is also a Rails-to-Trails trail between Ehrenfeld and Mineral Point.

The Pittsburgh District of the Corps of Engineers operates and maintains about 9 miles of channel project on the Little Conemaugh River, and Stonycreek and Conemaugh Rivers in Johnstown. The Corps has an interest in the recreational trail constructed along the right descending banks of the Little Conemaugh and Conemaugh Rivers near Johnstown Point. Known as the Johnstown Urban Greenway, this trail was constructed on Corps project lands through partnership with the Johnstown Urban Redevelopment Authority as a component of a potentially larger trail system. The only concern for the South Fork properties would be if the NPS extended its boundary to include either channel project or the greenway. The Corps requested consultation and involvement in the planning process, if the project would potentially affect the Corps' project. The Corps requested that they be included as a reviewer of the draft environmental assessment.

The Superintendent discussed the former uses of the Clubhouse, which included lodging, food and recreation. The outside of the structures would need to be maintained for historic integrity. He explained that the Moorhead Cottage did not have an HVAC system or plumbing and was currently under restoration by the NPS. The Brown Cottage is a duplex that is currently empty. A Save America's Treasures grant for \$350,000 was awarded in 2005 to stabilize the Clubhouse and Moorhead Cottage, to repair the roof, and to provide for HVAC and plumbing.

Public Scoping Meeting. A public open house was conducted during the evening of June 13, 2006, at the 1889 South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Clubhouse in St. Michael. Approximately 30 people attended the public open house. A brief overview of the purpose of

scoping, the intent of the meeting and the goals the park hopes to achieve through the process of gathering information was provided. A brief description of the two alternatives under consideration was also provided. Requests were made for information on any projects or plans proposed or underway that could possibly affect St. Michael and the area where the structures are located. Such plans could include transportation and access, water and sewer or other infrastructure projects. During the meeting, it was discovered that the area is under township zoning, and is designated mainly agricultural (A-1) and residential.

The following questions were raised. Answers to the questions follow:

- Have structural assessments been conducted on the buildings?

A: Yes, in 1990

- Does the Clubhouse have heat?

A: Formerly it had steam heat. Currently, it has a heater in the lobby.

- Are the three levels all original?

A: Yes, some entryways were cut and plastering was done. The first floor has been significantly remodeled. The second and third floors maintain their original footprint and much of the original fabric. Some fabric has been removed to accommodate a previous use as an apartment.

- Have cost estimates been prepared for the Moorhead and Brown Cottages?

A: Yes. Estimates have been prepared for the Clubhouse and the Moorhead Cottage to restore basic services. These estimates were completed in 2005. The NPS is still evaluating these estimates.

- Would the local fire department be able to handle a fire in one of the structures?

A: Yes, the fire department is only a short distance away and they recently responded to a fire in the district.

The following are uses the public would *not* like to see for the structures:

- No businesses or offices
- No public restaurants, such as a pizza shop, but rather a period restaurant serving period food.
- No bars, alcohol or smoking and no cell phones in historic structures

Some of the most ardent expressions of interest in the re-use of the historic structures were:

- Keep true to historic use of the buildings
- Use entire structure, if possible.
- Follow the historic structures report prepared by the Denver Service Center.⁴

Other ideas that were presented for re-use of the structures included--

1. Community center
2. St. Michael does not have a restaurant or lodging. The closest restaurant is Sidman. A representative from Radisson Hotels said there was not enough traffic and the Clubhouse was not large enough for their needs.
3. The influx of people may impact buildings through wear and tear on them.
4. Convert Brown Cottage to a bed & breakfast (B&B) and restore Clubhouse to original condition
5. Heat and air conditioning should be subtle, not intrusive.

⁴ Landmarks Design Associates, Architects and Wallace, Roberts & Todd. *Historic Structures Report Architectural & Historical Data Section, Clubhouse, Brown Cottage, Moorhead Cottage, Clubhouse Annex, South Fork Fish & Hunting Club, St. Michael, Pennsylvania*. Prepared under contract to the National Park Service, Denver Service Center for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission and The 1889 South Fork Fishing & Hunting Club Historical Preservation Society. Vols. 1 and 2.

6. Antique dealers
7. Upscale restaurant
8. NPS employee housing
9. Wedding catering and photo opportunity site
10. Limited restoration to interpret the members' life at the Club. Leasing of the remainder of the structure for other uses.

The Superintendent discussed the possibility of a “black box” theater as an intermediary use for part of the first floor of the Clubhouse.

The following statements summarize some of the individual comments received:

- Keep the building “active” and keep hosting events in the building (interpretive, music, social gathering), anything that gets people into the building and generates interest. Do not close it down during the long process that is about to begin.
- Emphasis on “period” presentation was discussed, including costumes, entertainment, restoration, etc.
- Consideration was given to stabilizing the building, renovating the outside to its historic appearance, restoring the first floor for limited NPS use and other compatible uses such as a dinner theater with docent-led tours on the upper floors was discussed. Due to limited funding, this could be an intermediate approach or a long-term use.
- Concern about intrusive climate control systems in the building was raised. Need to explain why climate controlled conditions are needed and that these systems can be installed in an understated and even invisible manner as demonstrated in the Lemon House.
- Maintaining authenticity to the period and to the story of the flood was emphasized as important elements to maintain.
- Conversion of one or more of these structures to commercial lodging and a nice restaurant would benefit the community.
- Use the Clubhouse as a senior citizens or community center on an interim basis until the NPS decides what to do with the structure long-term.

Seven written comments were submitted in the public comment box at the meeting. These comments are summarized below:

- Keep the area friendly; no bar or alcohol, no smoking
- A restaurant, such as a dinner theater, should be considered only if it has an historic theme. Elements of use should pertain to the history of the 1889 flood and the Clubhouse. Clubhouse should not be used in a manner in which the general public would generate a constant flow of traffic on a daily basis, causing wear on the structure.
- Possible temporary use as a senior citizens center.
- Police and rescue services would not be under any added stress in terms of availability to respond. Any change to the edifices that would destroy any historic mean would not and should not be accepted.
- Check zoning to ensure any commercial use would be allowed and check with township supervisors, county planning commission, and county redevelopment authority for information. Occupancy and use of buildings would probably lessen policy/fire impacts. Vacant buildings require more patrols; potential fire

hazards in unoccupied structures. There may be increased traffic issues. Removal of vacant buildings improve community image.

- A restaurant should be considered only on a historic venue, such as a dinner theatre. Concessions should be items that pertain to the history of the 1889 flood and the Clubhouse.
- Use the historic district to add to the story of the 1889 Johnstown Flood and as an enhancement to the Johnstown Flood National Memorial.
- Special occasion dining in the Clubhouse and a black box theatre with dining.
- Restore to original as close as possible; keep to original use of the buildings; restore Moorhead Cottage to original condition and do not modernize. No wallpaper; keep to original paint colors.
- Restore main floor of Clubhouse and second floor. Keep in the time period.
- Great idea to re-use buildings. May want to consider phasing re-use of buildings, given lots to restore. A lot of weight should be given to re-use agenda offered by “Friends” group and neighborhood residents. Welcome Center and interpretive venue for area are appropriate. Perhaps small restaurant might be successful. A marketing feasibility analysis may be appropriate to undertake.
- *Annex*: Lease two lower apartments and move the park offices to the second floor.
- *Brown Cottage*: Lease out for use as a B&B.
- *Clubhouse*: 1) Keep open to the public; 2) first floor, parlor, video room, dining room, kitchen. After moving park offices to the Clubhouse, open and furnish first floor for public tours; and 3) second floor, front half refinish rooms and furnish back half. Lease upper floors to antiques dealers.

Impact Topics Included in this Environmental Assessment

The following impact topics are discussed in Chapter 3-Affected Environment and are analyzed in Chapter 4-Environmental Consequences. These topics are resources of concern that could be beneficially or adversely affected by the actions proposed under each alternative and are developed to ensure that the alternatives are evaluated and compared based on the most relevant topics. A listing of impact topics dismissed from further analysis and reasons why they were dismissed follows at the end of this discussion.

Based on the issues that have been identified and the listing of mandatory impact topics, the following impact topics will be evaluated by alternatives:

- Historic Resources Impacts
- Design of the Built Environment Impacts
- Socioeconomic Impacts
- Health and Safety Impacts
- Energy Requirements and Conservation Potential

Impacts Dismissed from Further Analysis

- *Wetlands and Floodplains*-A review of local floodplain maps showed that the historic district and the historic structures are located outside the 100-year floodplain. A visual site inspection of the properties, and there are no regulated wetlands on any of the properties.
- *Water Resources*-No surface waters are located within the immediate area and there would be no proposed actions that would affect sources of water quality.

- *Prime and Unique Agricultural Land*-Based upon the Draft Boundary Study and Environmental Assessment, there are no prime or unique soils on any of the sites and no farmland will be affected by the proposed action.
- *Natural or Depletable Resource Requirements*-No natural or depletable resources, including minerals, timber, water or land will be used under any alternative.
- *Air Quality*- Johnstown Flood NMem and St. Michael are within the Johnstown nonattainment area for ozone. Neither the No Action alternative nor any of the proposed adaptive re-uses to the structures would change this regional designation. USEPA has given Cambria County until 2010 to attain acceptable ambient air quality standards for ozone and for fine particle matter levels. Because none of the alternatives or proposed re-uses would adversely affect or improve air quality in this region, this impact topic was dismissed from further analysis.
- *Threatened and Endangered Species*-Based on coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, no federally listed threatened or endangered species occur within Cambria County.⁵ NPS conducted two threatened and endangered species survey at the core portion of the park in 2000 and 2003. The historic district and the properties on which the structures are situated were not included in either survey. The northeastern bulrush (*Scirpus ancistrochaetus*), a perennial member of the sedge family (Cyperaceae), is listed by the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage as both a federally and a State endangered plant species known to occur in Cambria County. However, this species is not known to occur within the affected area, as the northeastern bulrush is found in small wetlands, usually 1 acre or less, where the water level is high in spring and drops through the summer.⁶ Refer to **Appendix E** for a listing of all federally and State protected species known to occur in Cambria County. A review of the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage database also showed that no federally or State protected species, rare or candidate species would be affected by either alternative under consideration.
- *Flora and Fauna*-Neither of the proposed alternatives or options would impact wildlife species, their habitat or vegetation. Therefore, this impact topic has been dismissed from further analysis. Wildlife that occurs in this area is typical edge species known to adapt to disturbed, developed human environments. White-tailed deer, gray squirrels, raccoons, opossum, passerines and raptors are common species in the area. The vegetation surrounding each of the structures is principally composed of mature trees, grasses and horticultural shrubs typically found in suburban residential areas. The undeveloped side-yard is planted to turf grass and has gravel cover for a parking area. Vintage rose bushes are present at the Clubhouse.⁷
- *Ecologically critical areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers or other unique natural resources*-A review of the National Natural Landmarks listing and the Nationwide Rivers Inventory for Pennsylvania showed that no wild and scenic rivers or segments of such rivers are within the project area. The area in which the structures are located is a developed residential neighborhood. No ecologically critical areas or sensitive habitat are within the affected area.
- *Sacred sites and Indian Trust resources*-Based on a review of Bureau of Indian Affairs records, there are no tribal lands, Indian Trust resources or sacred sites within Cambria County.

⁵ USFWS Threatened and Endangered Species System (TESS); <http://www.fws.gov/orve/42021.html>

⁶ PaDCNR. Northeastern Bulrush. <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/wrcf/bulrush.aspx>

⁷ Archaeological Services. Sept. 30, 2006. *Draft Phase I, II, and III Archaeological Investigations of the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Clubhouse.*

- *Socially or economically disadvantaged populations*-No socially or economically disadvantaged populations, as defined in Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, reside within the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club Historic District. Therefore, no such populations will be disproportionately or adversely affected under any alternative.