

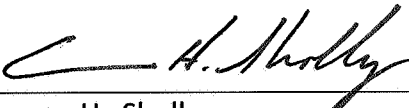
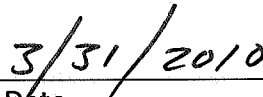

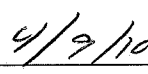
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
COLEY ROAD\BARNES CROSSING ROADWAY PROJECT
LEE COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

.....
USDI, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY

The selected alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The selected alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Negative environmental impacts that could occur are negligible or minor in intensity. There are no significant impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

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

Recommended:	 Cameron H. Sholly Superintendent Natchez Trace Parkway	 3/31/2010 Date
Approved:	 David Vela Southeast Region Director National Park Service	 4/9/10 Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT BARNES CROSSING-COLEY ROAD CROSSING LEE COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

.....

USDI, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY

Background

The 444-mile long Natchez Trace Parkway (Parkway) was established in 1938 to commemorate the historic Old Trace, a network of primitive trails connecting the Natchez area with the Nashville Basin. Each year this modern Parkway, designated as an All American Road, allows millions of visitors to follow the route of the old Indian Trace and experience the unique natural and cultural resources the National Park Service (NPS) manages and protects.

The City of Tupelo proposed the construction of a major thoroughfare arterial extending and connecting Coley Road from McCullough Boulevard to Highway 78 (future Interstate 22) and Barnes Crossing Road from North Gloster Street to the same location on Highway 78. The project will connect the northern and western sides of Tupelo, reducing the need for travel on currently-congested Gloster Street. The portion of this larger project that affects NPS lands includes a grade-separated, five-lane bridge over the Natchez Trace Parkway near milepost 265 (approximately one mile south of the Parkway Headquarters/Visitor Center).

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act and NPS policies, an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the proposed roadway was prepared in order to evaluate potential remedies to the problem of traffic congestion, while maintaining Parkway resources and values. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) should be attached to the EA.

Alternatives Considered

No Action Alternative 1

This alternative would consist of a "no-build" situation. This alternative would provide no relief of traffic congestion and will not address the immediate need for a safe and economical bypass route around the northern side of the City of Tupelo. The current situation creates unsafe traffic flows (including traffic on the Natchez Trace Parkway), and creates a hazard to the public, especially during peak times of

traffic flow to and from the Barnes Crossing retail shopping area.

Build Alternative 2

This alternative would consist of building a new roadway from McCullough Boulevard to the intersection of North Gloster Street and Barnes Crossing Road with a bridge overpass and interchange at Highway 78 and a bridge overpass at the Natchez Trace Parkway. This alignment would connect the existing extension of Coley Road and the proposed extension of Barnes Crossing Road, resulting in a direct connection with both Highway 78 and Highway 45.

Build Alternative 3

This alternative would consist of building a new roadway from McCullough Boulevard to the intersection of North Gloster Street and Barnes Crossing Road with a bridge overpass and interchange at Highway 78 and an underpass at the Natchez Trace Parkway. This alignment would also connect the existing extension of Coley Road and the proposed extension of Barnes Crossing Road, resulting in a direct connection with both Highway 78 and Highway 45.

Build Alternative 4

This alternative would consist of building a new roadway from McCullough Boulevard to the northern end of Beech Springs Road with a bridge overpass and interchange at Highway 78 and replacing an existing underpass at the intersection of Beech Springs Road and the Natchez Trace Parkway. This alternative would require the reconstruction of Beech Springs Road from the connection of the new roadway to the intersection at North Gloster Street.

None of the alternatives would cause impairment to park resources.

Alternatives Considered But Rejected

Direct access from the new roadways considered in Build Alternatives 2 or 3 to the Natchez Trace Parkway, via grade-separated interchange ramps, was considered but rejected because of non-compliance with National Park Service and Natchez Trace Parkway design guidelines. Among the design criteria specifically stipulated for national parkways are: a) eliminate major grade crossings (crossing intersections with the parkway motor road itself, and b) have entrance and exit points spaced at distant intervals to reduce interruptions to the main traffic flow. Overall, the Natchez Trace Parkway is a limited access recreational motor road which already allows for six at-grade interchanges within the Tupelo city limits. The Parkway has chosen not to consider any alternative that would add another interchange in Tupelo.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Environmentally Preferred Alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), which is guided by Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations. CEQ regulations provide direction that “the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s Section 101 which considers:

1. Fulfilling the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Assuring for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attaining the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. Preserving important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintaining, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
5. Achieving a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
6. Enhancing the quality of renewable resources and approaching the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Although the No Action Alternative would have the least immediate effect on Parkway resources, the immediate need for a safe and economical bypass route around the northern side of the City of Tupelo would not be addressed. The current situation (which would remain the case with no action) consists of increased traffic on the Natchez Trace Parkway and potentially hazardous conditions for motorists in the City of Tupelo. Build Alternative 2, in which the Parkway is bridged by the roadway, is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative for several reasons. This alternative results in the fewest acres of wetland impacts, and mitigation associated with the project will increase the overall acreage of Parkway wetlands. Build Alternative 2 will not bisect the wildlife corridor associated with animals travelling within the Parkway lands, whereas Build Alternative 1 would force wildlife to cross four lanes of traffic in order to migrate north or south of the project area. Shorter travel distances associated with this roadway project should have a positive long-term effect on air quality and energy conservation. Lastly, Build Alternative 2 will result in the least amount of aesthetic impact to the viewshed, since Parkway visitors will not be elevated above the urban development (via a bridge) that will likely accommodate the roadway.

Of the build alternatives, Alternative 2 will have the least impact on the natural resources, visitor use, and viewshed of the Parkway. Based on the environmental analyses contained in

the EA, agency and public comments and NPS management policies, the NPS decision is to select the Preferred Alternative, hereinafter referred to as the Selected Alternative

Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative

Natural Resources

Vegetation. The majority of the project area is predominately converted cropland with native grasses and planted trees (approximate heights from 3 to 6 feet). The existing species abundance will remain relatively constant; however, some existing vegetation in the immediate right-of-way of the proposed project will be cleared for road construction. Re-grassing of right-of-way slopes along with landscaping efforts by the City of Tupelo will mitigate immediate effects. Landscaping efforts will consist of an approved landscaping plan incorporating native plant materials. Care will be taken to ensure that any disturbed areas are re-vegetated in order to prevent the influx of invasive species. Subsequent tree planting and landscaping will enhance the vegetative cover for this area, in an attempt to screen out new development. No impairment to local vegetation should occur.

Threatened and Endangered Species. The Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks Mississippi Natural Heritage Program and United States Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the assessment of no impact to threatened or endangered species, or their habitats.

Wildlife. There will be temporary disturbance associated with the construction of the new road crossing that will cause birds and terrestrial wildlife to flee the area. Some limited wildlife mortality (turtles, burrowing animals) may occur. It is assumed that once construction activities have ceased, most displaced species will return. The Selected Alternative will allow for movement of wildlife under the bridge, as the bridge must be made long enough to accommodate the Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail parallel to the parkway motor road. While another roadway crossing the Parkway in the Tupelo area will not benefit wildlife, the overall deleterious effect on wildlife should be minimal.

Wetlands. The selected alternative will have a direct impact on approximately 4.44 acres of NPS wetlands. Through the permitting process of the US Army Corps of Engineers, mitigation will be required to replace any wetlands which would be destroyed. In addition, the process of placing embankments along low lying areas often creates wetlands by inadvertently impounding water. Mitigation will be accomplished by restoring 9 acres of degraded wetlands elsewhere within the Park. Nine acres of mitigated wetlands located near Parkway mileposts 127.4 and 228.5, and 267) will result in 4, 3, and 2 acres of restored wetlands, respectively). These wet areas will be taken out of the current mowing regime, and allowed to undergo natural succession from agricultural field to bottomland forest.

Physical Environment

Air Quality. No long-term air quality impacts are expected as a result of the Selected Alternative. Although a new road would lead to more development which could result in increased traffic and emissions, the direct link from west Tupelo to northeast Tupelo will greatly reduce the travel distance, time, and congestion associated with the traffic in this area. This should result in a positive long-term effect on air quality. During construction, minor short-term impacts to air quality levels may occur under the Selected Alternative.

Water Quality. Potential short-term impacts to water quality due to erosion may exist during construction; however, best management practices will be utilized to minimize potential impacts. A sediment and erosion control plan, including the use of best management practices, would be prepared as a part of the selected alternative. In addition, any resulting developments would be regulated by local codes to include storm water detention, which will also help to provide sedimentation control.

Soils. No native soils should be adversely affected as a result of the selected alternative. Local soils will be excavated and re-used for embankment sections. Best management practices and permanent erosion control measures such as grassing, landscaping, rip rap, and ditch treatments will minimize or eliminate erosion/loss of native soils.

Noise. Under the Selected Alternative, existing noise levels would temporarily increase during construction. Some minor, long-term, adverse impacts could be expected as a result of road noise from traffic on the proposed roadway. The majority of the areas impacted are remote with no existing residences or businesses to be affected. Since the primary users of the proposed roadway would be passenger vehicles and the roadway will not contain rumble strips along the shoulders, any permanent increase in noise levels should be negligible.

Viewshed. Under the Selected Alternative, the proposed bridge over the Parkway and the associated embankment would have some minor, long-term, adverse impacts on the existing viewshed. However, by following existing Parkway design guidelines/handbooks for the design and construction of the structures and natural landscaping along the new construction area, the direct and indirect effects from future development could be screened. Although some impact to the viewshed will be inevitable, the effect can be minimized through proper planning, landscaping, and zoning regulations.

Flood Plains. The selected alternative includes areas within the 100 year flood plain. Any possible risks associated with the proposed project will be minimal as a result of implementing design procedures that strive for a near no-rise condition impact. Any impacts on natural and beneficial flood plain values will also be minimal since the area is presently primarily agricultural. The project will be designed to minimize negative impacts to existing flood elevations by providing adequate openings for existing channels and floodways. Drainage structures on the section near the Parkway will be designed for 100 year storm events and

adequate openings will be provided. No risk of adverse impact exists for this section of the proposed project, per a "Statement of Findings for Executive Order 11988-Floodplain Management", that has been prepared in conjunction with this EA. The local flood plain manager has been consulted to ensure that the proposed action is consistent with existing watershed and flood plain management programs. No floodways are anticipated to be affected by this project.

Night Sky. Under the Selected Alternative, new or expanded roadways will cross Parkway property, adding the additional glare of headlights as motorists briefly transit the park after dark. However, this additional light pollution will add only negligibly to the already-impacted night skies in this section of the Parkway. The commercial district of Barnes Crossing is located within a mile of the park and continues to grow, creating night skies typical for an urban park.

Socio-Economic Environment

No appreciable change from the existing conditions is anticipated. The area surrounding the project will continue to be a mixture of commercial, industrial, residential and agricultural land. Although commercial and residential development will occur, these types of development are occurring in the area regardless of the chosen alternative, and will be influenced by City zoning.

Cultural Resources

In accordance with responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR Part 800, the proposed project location was reviewed by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). The MDAH concurred that the Selected Alternative will have no adverse effect to the Natchez Trace Parkway or any cultural/historic resources listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, because the Natchez Trace Parkway itself is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the MDAH will be consulted for input on the final bridge design.

Parkway Visitor Use and Experience

Existing hiking and biking trails, including the Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail, will be incorporated into the proposed project to ensure that current use of the Parkway would remain unchanged. Temporary impacts could occur during construction as activities may require temporary rerouting of sections of the existing trails. The Selected Alternative would require temporarily rerouting parkway vehicle traffic. Visits to the Parkway will remain relatively unchanged and are considered negligible.

Energy Requirements and Conservation

The Selected Alternative would have a positive impact on energy use and conservation. By providing a shorter and more direct route for traffic crossing town to get to the Barnes Crossing

area and the Highway 45 Bypass, resulting in lower fuel consumption. Additionally, moving traffic away from the heavily-congested areas currently being utilized, as well as lowered numbers of idling vehicles, would result in reduced driving time. The selected alternative would result in major, long-term, beneficial impacts as reflected in the Benefit / Cost Analysis performed by the City of Tupelo in conjunction with the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

Why The Selected Alternative Will Not Have A Significant Effect On The Human Environment

The Selected Alternative may have minor, short-term and long-term, adverse impacts to wetlands, wildlife, and aesthetic resources along the Parkway. However, such impacts will be minor, and/or mitigated. Therefore, no impairment of park resources or visitor experience will result from the proposed project.

As defined at 40 CFR §1508.27, from the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality that implement the provisions of NEPA, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial

The Selected Alternative will result in both positive and adverse impacts to natural resources. Adverse effects will be minimized and mitigated, resulting in a general benefit to the human environment in both the short-term and long-term. More specifically, wetland mitigation associated with the project will increase the amount of wetland acreage on the Parkway. Shorter travel distances associated with the selected alternative should have a positive long-term effect on air quality and energy use/conservation. Additionally, reduction in farming activities, along with regulations regarding storm water control should help to improve water quality. Intensive native landscaping surrounding the bridge crossing will minimize the visual intrusion of the bridge and associated traffic.

The degree to which the action affects public health or safety

The Selected Alternative, in the context of the larger roadway project, will produce safer roadways with less likelihood of serious and/or fatal accidents, and potentially reduced commuter traffic on the Natchez Trace. Therefore, the Selected Alternative will positively affect public safety.

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 Mississippi Department of Archives and History has determined that the implementation of the Selected Alternative will result in no significant adverse effects to cultural resources.

Wetlands delineated within the project area were classified according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Cowardin criteria, and analyzed per compliance with NPS Director's Order/Reference Manual 77-1. Statements of Finding for floodplains and wetlands were prepared in conjunction with Executive Orders 11988 and 19990, respectively. As a result, a 2:1 ratio of mitigation for wetland impacts will be performed, resulting in 9 acres of wetland mitigation on Parkway lands. With regard to floodplains, any possible flooding risks associated with the Selected Alternative will be minimized as a result of implementing design procedures that strive for a near no-rise condition impact by providing adequate openings for existing channels and floodways. Any impacts to the floodplain should be minimal due to the agricultural character of the area

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

Implementation of the project will not result in controversial effects on the human environment.

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

There are no identified risks associated with the selected alternative that are unique or unknown, and there are no effects associated with the selected alternative that are highly uncertain identified during the analysis for the EA or during the public review of the EA.

The 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 selected alternative does not establish a precedent for any future actions that may have significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about future considerations of similar type.

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

The selected alternative will continue to provide opportunities for visitor enjoyment and is consistent with the retention of Parkway values in accordance with the National Park Service Organic Act, as amended. In the Council on Environmental Quality's "Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act" (40 CFR 1508.7), a cumulative impact is defined as the impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such actions. Cumulative impacts are likely to occur when a relationship exists between a proposed action and other actions expected to occur in the area of potential effect for the resource issues analyzed. Projects in close proximity to the project area will be expected to have a greater

potential for a relationship that could result in cumulative impacts than those more geographically separated.

The Selected Alternative will result in the addition of a bridge crossing the Natchez Trace Parkway in an area currently dominated by agricultural fields. Minor short-term impacts to the natural and physical environment, such as noise, wildlife habitat disruption, and vegetation disturbance, will result during the construction of the bridge. Additionally, long-term impacts, such as conversion of existing wetlands and viewshed impacts, will be mitigated. However, minor adverse longterm impacts may result from the commercial development that will likely occur along the roadway on lands adjacent to the Parkway. Positive longterm socioeconomic impacts of the Selected Alternative will result in increased visitor and public safety in the form of reduced traffic and congestion on the Parkway and surrounding area. These actions are not considered cumulatively significant.

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

Pursuant to responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR Part 800, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) reviewed the proposed project and determined that the implementation of the Selected Alternative will result in no adverse affect to known cultural resources listed in or eligible for listing the National Register of Historic Places. However, because the Natchez Trace Parkway itself is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the MDAH will be consulted for input on the final bridge design.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the United States Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was consulted for possible impacts of proposed alternatives to any listed species/habitats. At their request, a survey was conducted within the proposed right-of-way for the threatened Price's Potato Bean (*Apios priceana*). A complete survey found no occurrence of the *A. priceana* within or adjacent to the proposed project. The FWS concurred with the assessment of no effect to federally-listed/candidate species or their habitats within the project area. The Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks Mississippi Natural Heritage Program was also consulted for possible impacts associated with all the build alternatives. Their response was that if best management practices are implemented, the proposed project poses no threat to state or federally-listed species or their habitats.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

This action violates no Federal, State, or local environmental protection laws.

Mitigation

Because the Selected Alternative involves unavoidable but direct impacts to NPS wetlands and floodplains, wetlands and floodplain Statements of Findings (SOF) have been prepared and approved. The wetland SOF measures that will be taken to avoid or minimize impacts to wetlands and outlines the plan to compensate 9 acres for the 4.44 acres of affected wetlands. The floodplain SOF specifies procedures to minimize disturbance to the floodplain present in the project area, the use of erosion and sediment control plans, and revegetation of any disturbed areas with native plant species. Any possible flooding risks associated with the proposed project will be minimized as a result of implementing design procedures that strive for a near no-rise condition impact by providing adequate openings for existing channels and floodways.

Summary of Public Involvement

Formal discussions on a potential crossing of the Natchez Trace Parkway began in 2006, with EA preparations beginning in 2007. Local, public, and agency involvement was utilized in the scoping efforts for the development of the EA, including the appropriate natural and cultural resource agencies/entities (refer to the EA for a complete list of consulted agencies). The United States Fish and Wildlife Service commented that there are no federally endangered species or associated habitats within the project area. In an attempt to reach additional agencies and individuals interested in providing comment on the proposed roadway, notices of availability and press releases were sent to media contacts along the length of the Parkway. All recognized Native American tribes associated with the region were given the opportunity to review the EA and provide comment. Finally, both the notice of availability and the EA were posted on the Planning and Environmental Public Comment website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>), and the Parkway Headquarters/Visitor Center.

The EA was made available for a 30-day public review from December 15, 2009, through January 22, 2010. A notice of availability of the EA was distributed to interested individuals and state/federal agencies on December 14, 2009. On January 7, 2010, a public meeting was held at the City Hall in Tupelo, MS. The public meeting resulted in 38 written comments. The responses were approximately 87% in favor of the Preferred Alternative, 8% in favor of one of the build alternatives (including the preferred alternative), and 5% were in favor of the No Build Alternative. The comments were not substantive and did not add new information that would change the alternatives or impact assessment.

The EA identifies no significant adverse environmental impacts from the proposed work.

Impairment Statement

In addition to reviewing the list of significance criteria, NPS staff have determined that implementation of the proposal will not constitute an impairment to the critical resources and values of the NATR. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the EA, associated scientific field studies, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in *NPS Management Policies 2006*. Overall, the plan under the selected alternative will not result in any adverse impacts to the NATR's resources.