

Finding of No Significant Impact
Supplemental Environmental Assessment
Barn Improvements at Meadowood Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)
DOI-BLM-ES-0920-2015-0011-EA

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared a Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) DOI-BLM-ES-0920-2015-0011-EA to address minor improvements in and around the existing barn at the Meadowood SRMA in Lorton, Virginia. In April 2014, BLM completed the *Environmental Assessment for Barn Deferred Maintenance at Meadowood SRMA* (EA), Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Decision Record for several proposed renovations to the existing barn to bring it into conformance with structural, plumbing, electrical, and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) standards for Federal facilities. Since that time, additional proposed improvements have been identified including temporary equestrian shelters and feeding areas onsite to accommodate horses and user groups while the barn repairs occur; minor grading near the barn and indoor and outdoor riding arenas; and installation of temporary lighting at the outdoor arena. In addition to the proposed action, two other alternatives were analyzed in the SEA, a No Action alternative; and Alternative Two, implementation of the improvements described in the proposed action except that the horses would not be kept in the pastures in temporary shelters overnight and construction activities would occur during daytime hours only.

EXTERNAL SCOPING

Consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was conducted for the project in compliance with the Endangered Species Act, Section 7 consultation requirements. Based upon a project review submitted to the FWS Virginia Field Office, potential impacts to the northern long-eared bat (threatened), dwarf wedgemussel (endangered), and small whorled pogonia (threatened) were examined. BLM determined that the proposed action or alternatives are unlikely to affect these species and no further consultation is required with the FWS Virginia Field Office.

BLM consulted with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VADHR) at various points during the planning of the project and in June 2015, the Northeastern States District (NSD) archaeologist conducted a BLM Class III/Phase I cultural survey of certain areas within the decision area. The NSD submitted a report of the findings for the June 2015 survey to VADHR asking for concurrence by VADHR that there would be no adverse effects to historic properties for all aspects of the proposed project. In a letter to the BLM dated July 17, 2015, the VADHR stated, “based upon the results of the survey, we concur with your determination that the proposed Meadowood Barn Renovation and Connected Actions will have No Adverse Effect on historic properties.”

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon a review of the SEA and supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively, with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27.

This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

Context:

The proposed action would occur at the Meadowood SRMA located in Fairfax County, Virginia, approximately 2.5 miles southeast of downtown Lorton, Virginia and approximately 17.5 miles southwest of downtown Washington, DC. The Meadowood SRMA is managed for natural and cultural resources, and offers a variety of recreational opportunities including trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding, fishing ponds, a control-line airplane flying area, environmental education programs, picnicking, geocaching, and bird watching. A concessionaire (CAS) who manages private horse boarders, and a non-profit operated therapeutic riding center (Simple Changes), presently use the existing barn. CAS manages approximately 35 horses and Simple Changes manages approximately five horses.

The Meadowood barn needs renovating to bring it into conformance with structural, plumbing, electrical, and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) standards for Federal facilities. While the repairs are ongoing, temporary equestrian shelters and feeding areas are needed onsite outside of the barn to minimize and mitigate safety risks to humans and horses during the anticipated six-month construction timeframe. Having full access to the horses outside the barn during the construction period would also minimize disruption to horseback riding operations of CAS, Simple Changes, and the public.

Additionally, temporary lighting needs to be installed at the outdoor arena to allow for riding lessons and other activities to continue while the indoor arena is undergoing repairs. The indoor and outdoor arenas need to be graded to improve overall traction. Minor grading and improvements are also required immediately adjacent to the barn to improve drainage during rain events and to provide for improved storage facilities for manure and bedding materials for the stalls. After construction, two pastures would be rotated into use to provide for rest-rotation of the main pastures used to accommodate horses during construction and to maintain desired ecological conditions.

Other actions taking place or recently occurring at Meadowood SRMA include ongoing maintenance of the facility and pastures, a streambank erosion research study, potential acquisitions of adjacent parcels, and a wild horse and burro adoption.

Intensity:

The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered (includes supplemental authorities BLM NEPA Handbook Appendix 1, H-1790-1) and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, regulations and Executive Orders. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The proposed action would affect resources as described in the SEA. The SEA analyzed the potential for direct impacts from the proposed action and alternatives to cultural resources, fish and wildlife, hazardous wastes, health and human safety, noxious and invasive plant species, recreation, soils, special-status species, vegetation, and water resources. The proposed improvements at Meadowood SRMA would be accomplished over an approximately six-month time period that may cause minor inconveniences to equestrian activities and for recreational users, but these activities would continue during the construction period and not differ from past activities at the Meadowood SRMA. The proposed action would affect approximately 12 acres at Meadowood SRMA. There are no potential cumulative impacts associated with the proposed construction activities because the past, ongoing, and reasonably foreseeable projects mentioned in the SEA are temporally and spatially separate from the Proposed Action and alternatives and are not expected to cumulatively affect the decision area. Mitigating measures to reduce impacts to the various resources were incorporated in the design of the proposed action. None of the direct, indirect, or cumulative environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant.

The proposed action and No Action alternative are in conformance with the *Meadowood Farm Planning Analysis/Environmental Assessment* (2003) and the *Meadowood Special Recreation Management Area Integrated Activity Management Plan/Environmental Assessment* (2004).

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The Proposed Action would take place within an existing barn footprint and areas that are already heavily grazed and disturbed. No unique habitat or ecosystems would be lost due to this action. Implementation of the proposed action would not result in any impacts that would reduce environmental productivity, permanently narrow the range of beneficial uses of the environment, or pose long-term risks to health, safety, or the general welfare of the public. As described in the 2014 EA, the Meadowood barn needs renovating to bring it into conformance with structural, plumbing, electrical, and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) standards for Federal facilities. While the repairs are ongoing, temporary equestrian shelters and feeding areas would be utilized in the pasture areas outside of the barn to minimize and mitigate safety risks to humans and horses during the anticipated six-month construction timeframe. Temporary lighting installed at the outdoor arena would safely allow for riding lessons and other activities to continue while the

indoor arena is undergoing repairs. Traction for horses and riders would improve through grading of the indoor and outdoor arenas. Minor grading and improvements are also required immediately adjacent to the barn to improve drainage during rain events and to provide for improved storage facilities for manure and bedding materials for the stalls.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The SEA evaluated the area of the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics such as Wild and Scenic Rivers, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Designated Wilderness areas, or Wilderness Study Areas were present. The surface water on the Meadowood property is limited to a small man made wetland and Thompson Creek. The small wetland is located within one of the pastures proposed for rotation, but it would be fenced and would therefore not be affected by the proposed action. Thompson Creek is not located within the decision area. Regarding cultural resources, the NSD archaeologist conducted a BLM Class III/Phase I cultural survey in June 2015 of certain areas within the decision area. The NSD submitted a report of the findings for the June 2015 survey to VADHR asking for concurrence by VADHR that there would be no adverse effects to historic properties for all aspects of the proposed project. In a letter to the BLM dated July 17, 2015, the VADHR stated, “based upon the results of the survey, we concur with your determination that the proposed Meadowood Barn Renovation and Connected Actions will have No Adverse Effect on historic properties.” There are no known paleontological remains within the decision area. There would be no direct impacts to cultural resources. All known cultural resources would be avoided by design.

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

Effects on the quality of the human environment are not expected to be significant or highly controversial. Controversy in this context is considered to be in terms of disagreement about the nature of the effect - not political controversy or expression of opposition to the action or preference among the alternatives analyzed within the SEA. The public had opportunities to provide comments on the 2014 EA regarding the barn repairs; the proposed action analyzed in the SEA addresses additional minor improvements inside the barn and to areas outside of the barn. The BLM coordinated with the two primary user groups, CAS and Simple Changes, throughout development of the SEA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the

SEA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6. 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.

This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions. Future Federal actions at the Meadowood SRMA will be addressed by site-specific NEPA analyses.

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

The interdisciplinary team evaluated the proposed action's potential for cumulative impacts in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Recently completed, ongoing, and future activities at Meadowood SRMA include a research study of erosion on Thompson Creek, acquisition of additional parcels, ongoing maintenance in various areas on the property, and a wild horse and burro adoption. These activities are temporally and spatially separate from the proposed action and alternatives and not expected to result in significant cumulative impacts.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The NSD archaeologist conducted a BLM Class III/Phase I cultural survey in June 2015 of certain areas within the decision area. The NSD submitted a report of the findings for the June 2015 survey to VADHR asking for concurrence by VADHR that there would be no adverse effects to historic properties for all aspects of the proposed project. In a letter to the BLM dated July 17, 2015, the VADHR stated, "based upon the results of the survey, we concur with your determination that the proposed Meadowood Barn Renovation and Connected Actions will have No Adverse Effect on historic properties." There are no known paleontological remains within the decision area.

9. 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 ESA of 1973.

Based upon a project review submitted to the FWS Virginia Field Office, potential impacts to the northern long-eared bat (threatened), dwarf wedgemussel (endangered), and small whorled pogonia (threatened) were examined. The northern long-eared bat would be impacted only by tree clearing, which is not part of the proposed action or alternatives. The small whorled pogonia could potentially be impacted by driving equipment in a wooded area, but surveys from the past several years have not revealed this species at Meadowood SRMA. The dwarf wedgemussel lives in streams, which would not be impacted by the proposed action or alternatives. BLM

determined that the proposed action or alternatives are unlikely to affect these species and no further consultation is required with the FWS Virginia Field Office.

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

The project does not violate any known Federal, State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies and programs.



Dean Gettinger, District Manager
Northeastern States District

8/27/2015
Date