

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)  
FOR THE PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF TURNOUT LANES FROM  
VIRGINIA STATE HIGHWAY 175 TO THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL  
SATELLITE, DATA, AND INFORMATION SERVICE (NESDIS) WALLOPS  
COMMAND AND DATA ACQUISITION STATION (CDAS),  
WALLOPS ISLAND, VIRGINIA**

**1. Purpose and Need**

The National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS) is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. NESDIS operates environmental satellites, which collect information on atmospheric, oceanic, and terrestrial environmental conditions. The Wallops Command and Data Acquisition Station (CDAS), operated by NESDIS, gathers data from satellites via radio downlinks and controls satellites via transmission of radio signals. The Wallops CDAS is a tenant on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Wallops Flight Facility (WFF) Main Base. NASA served as a cooperating agency in the preparation of this Environmental Assessment (EA) and provided valuable data on the WFF's natural environmental resources, cultural resources, and subsurface contaminant characterization studies.

NOAA prepared this EA to set forth: (1) its decision-making authority for this project, (2) its evaluation of the possible alternatives and the effects of each alternative's effect on the environment, (3) its determination from the evaluation of all the alternatives that, other than the no-action alternative or other partial aspects of the preferred alternative, the preferred alternative would be the most ecologically sound alternative, and (4) its determination that an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not need to be prepared for this project.

Section 1508.27 of the NEPA regulations describes the minimum criteria that federal agencies should consider in evaluating the potential significance of proposed actions. The regulations explain that significance embodies considerations of both context and intensity. In the case of site-specific actions such as those proposed in this EA, the appropriate context for considering significance of action is local, as opposed to national or worldwide.

**2. Description of Proposed Action**

NESDIS proposes to improve vehicular access to the Wallops CDAS and improve highway safety of Wallops CDAS personnel and visitors by constructing turnout lanes from Virginia State Highway 175 to the access road between September 2004 and April 2005. Currently, access to the Wallops CDAS from the west is by way of a jug

handle lane that carries traffic off of Highway 175, then back around to the north to a point where it intersects Highway 175 directly across from the access road entrance. Vehicles must stop at a stop sign south of Highway 175, then cross Highway 175 two traffic lanes to access the Wallops CDAS access road. Motorists routinely either do not recognize the presence of the jug handle lane or they choose to avoid the jug handle lane and turn left onto the Wallops CDAS access road directly from the eastbound lane of Highway 175. Westbound traffic accesses the Wallops CDAS unnamed access road by way of a short turnout lane on the right side of Highway 175. Specifically, to implement the road improvement projects, NOAA will:

- Remove the existing jug handle lane pavement and road bed.
- Widen approximately 1,100 ft of Highway 175 to accommodate a left turn in the center of the roadway.
- Widen approximately 120 ft of the westbound lane of Highway 175 and approximately 190 ft of the existing right turn lane onto the Wallops CDAS access road.
- Create a new 80 ft long right turn taper lane from Highway 175 onto the unnamed Chincoteague well field access road.

The existing 50 ft wide Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) easement passes through the eastern margin of the NASA WFF property. The proposed road improvements would require that additional VDOT easement be obtained from NASA, increasing the easement from 50 ft wide to 90 ft wide. As required by federal law, the alternative of taking no action is also examined in this EA. Under the no-action alternative, NESDIS would not construct the needed vehicular access improvements to the Wallops CDAS.

### **3. Environmental Consequences**

Implementation of the Highway 175 road improvements proposed by NESDIS would cause minimal physical change in the environment and are consistent with improvements that VDOT recommends for the local transportation system. VDOT requires that NOAA coordinate with the VDOT Accomack Residency office on the project design and work zone safety. Construction of the road improvements would temporarily increase vehicle traffic, noise, and emissions of air pollutants from exhaust and dust particles during the construction period. However, no long term impacts will result from implementation of the proposed action. Highway safety would increase as vehicles would only need to cross one lane of traffic to gain entry onto the Wallops CDAS access road rather than two traffic lanes, as occurs when utilizing the current jug handle lane. Traffic congestion would decrease at the intersection as vehicles entering the Wallops CDAS access road would wait in the dedicated left turn lane rather than in the eastbound travel lane where

they may obstruct traffic flow. Construction related traffic delays would be minimized by restricting the construction project to the period of time between mid-September 2004 and mid-April 2005, thereby avoiding the height of the local tourism season. Additionally, during construction lane closures would be restricted to the hours between 8:30 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. to avoid normal morning and evening commuting periods. Construction expenditures by NESDIS would represent a modest beneficial impact to the local economy. No long-term increase in employment at the Wallops CDAS or the NASA WFF is expected to result. Socioeconomic impacts would be insignificant. The census tract containing the Wallops CDAS and NASA WFF has lower per capita income, a lower unemployment rate, a lower percentage of persons living in poverty, and a higher percentage of minority persons than Accomack County as a whole. However, disproportionately high and adverse environmental effects on minority or low income communities would not result.

Installation of the road improvements would not significantly affect ecological or natural resources. Based on consultations with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, no adverse effects would result on protected species or critical wildlife habitat. The proposed construction activities would not occur in wetlands subject to federal jurisdiction or within the 100-year floodplain. Farmland and designated wild and scenic rivers are not present at or near the Wallops CDAS and would not be affected. The proposed road improvements would not create hazardous environmental conditions.

There are no places listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) within the Wallops CDAS or the proposed project area within the VDOT Highway 175 easement. The proposed project area is located in an area of moderate prehistoric and high historic archaeological sensitivity. As required by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR), NOAA performed a Phase 1 archaeological survey of the portions of the proposed project area that is not currently paved. Results of the survey indicate that no portion of the project area is eligible for inclusion in the NRHP. The VDHR concurred with this finding in a letter to NOAA dated July 13, 2004.

Under the no-action alternative, NESDIS would not construct the needed road improvements that would serve the Wallops CDAS. The proposed vehicle access improvements and highway safety benefits would not be achieved and the government would fail to capitalize on available funding. For these reasons, the no-action alternative has been rejected by NESDIS.

#### **4. Mitigation Measures**

The following mitigation measures will be implemented by NESDIS to ensure that no significant effects on the quality of the human environment will result from implementation of the proposed actions:

- NESDIS will coordinate with the VDOT Accomack Residency on the project design and implementation to ensure that work is consistent with current VDOT design and work zone safety requirements.
- To minimize traffic delays to both the Wallops area commuting work force and vacation travelers visiting the Chincoteague area, the road construction project will be started in mid-September 2004 and be completed before mid-April 2005. Additionally, during that time lane closures will be restricted to the hours between 8:30 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. to minimize construction related traffic delays to the Wallops area commuting work force.
- NESDIS will obtain an excavation permit from the NASA Facilities Management Branch prior to start of excavation activities.
- To minimize the amount of dust generated during the road construction, exposed areas of soil will be sprayed with water or treated with dust suppressants. Additionally, spilled or tracked dirt or other materials and dried sediments resulting from soil erosion will be promptly removed from paved surfaces.
- NESDIS will obtain a Virginia Pollution Discharge Elimination System stormwater general permit for the construction activities, and prepare an erosion and sedimentation control plan, and a stormwater management plan to ensure best management practices and compliance with state law during construction.
- The proposed road design will include design features to provide for appropriate surface grades and drainage ditches to carry stormwater runoff to storm sewer inlets and discharge outlets in conformance with VDOT design requirements.
- To minimize the potential for soil erosion, standard erosion control measures will be implemented at all areas of soil disturbance in accordance with the Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Handbook. Those measures will include placement of temporary silt fences or hay bales at the boundaries of cleared areas to retain soil, periodic spraying of water on bare soil to reduce dust entrainment, and prompt planting or hydroseeding of bare areas after construction is complete to establish vegetative cover. Construction activities would be monitored to ensure that erosion and sediment control and stormwater management practices are adequately preventing sediment and pollutant migration into surface waters, including wetlands.

- Prior to the start of construction, archaeological resource awareness training will be performed to inform the construction engineers and contractors of the potential presence of prehistoric and historic artifacts in the project area, and of the necessary procedures to be taken if artifacts are unearthed.
- If potentially significant artifacts are uncovered during construction activities, construction activities that could harm the find will be suspended and the NASA Facility Historic Preservation Officer and the VDHR will be notified to assess the significance of the find. The VDHR can be contacted at (804) 367-2323.
- Some wastes, such as chemicals and rags used to clean or degrease materials and equipment, may be considered hazardous. They will be separated from non-hazardous wastes for proper disposal. All solid waste, hazardous waste, and hazardous materials will be managed in accordance with all applicable federal, state and local environmental regulations. Asphalt removed from the jug handle and roadway should be recycled either for reuse within the road project or other project requiring stone aggregate.
- If during construction suspected petroleum contaminated soil is encountered, the suspect contaminated soil will be segregated and contained to prevent further spreading and the soil will be sampled and tested for the presence of petroleum hydrocarbons and volatile organic compounds. The DEQ Tidewater Regional Office and NASA Environmental Office will be notified to determine the need for additional measures.
- NESDIS will provide road design plans to Accomack County for a 30-day courtesy review and allow normal inspections during the construction period as required by the *Public Buildings Amendments of 1988, Public Law 100-678*. Additionally, plans and specifications will be submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality Tidewater Regional Office for review.

## **5. Public Involvement**

NESDIS will distribute the Final EA and FONSI to resource agencies and interested members of the public for review and comment. A copy of each document will also be placed in the Eastern Shore Public Library and in the Chincoteague Island Library. A legal notice of the availability of the Final EA and FONSI will be published in the *Eastern Shore News*. NESDIS will accept comments on the Final EA and FONSI from government agencies, local organizations, and the public for at least 30 days after publication of the Notice of Availability.

## 6. Conclusion and NOAA Finding

After careful and thorough consideration of the Final EA report, the undersigned NOAA official finds that the proposed federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives set forth in sections 101(a) and 101(b) of NEPA and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise result in any condition requiring consultation pursuant to section 102(2)(c) of NEPA. As described in section 5.03.c of NOAA Administrative Order 216-6, a FONSI is supported and appropriate for the proposed action.

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Gregory W. Withee  
Assistant Administrator for  
Satellite and Information Services  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric  
Administration

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Date

## 7. Conclusion and NASA Finding

After careful and thorough consideration of the Final EA report, the undersigned NASA official finds that the proposed federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives set forth in sections 101(a) and 101(b) of NEPA and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise result in any condition requiring consultation pursuant to section 102(2)(c) of NEPA. As described in Section 5.4.3 of NASA Procedural Requirements 8580.1, *Implementing the National Environmental Policy and Executive Order 12114*, a FONSI is supported and appropriate for the proposed action.

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Dr. John H. Campbell  
Director, Suborbital and Special Orbital Projects  
Wallops Flight Facility  
Goddard Space Flight Center  
National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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Date