

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Final Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates the potential environmental consequences resulting from the Department of the Navy's (Navy's) transfer of excess Federal property at the former Naval Air Station (NAS) Alameda to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and VA's subsequent construction and operation of an outpatient clinic, outreach office, National Cemetery, and associated infrastructure to serve San Francisco Bay Area (Bay Area) Veterans. The project area is shown in Figure 1-1.

This document has been prepared by the Navy and VA, acting as joint lead agencies, in accordance with:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (Public Law 91-190, 42 U.S. Code [USC] 4321–4370f), as amended;
- Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500–1508);
- Navy procedures for implementing NEPA (32 CFR 775) and Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Instruction 5090.1C CH-1;
- Environmental Effects of Department of VA Actions (38 CFR 26); and
- VA NEPA Interim Guidance for Projects.

The Navy would be responsible for transfer of excess Federal property and VA would be responsible for site preparation activities and the construction and operation of the proposed facilities. In addition, VA would be responsible for implementation of mitigation measures identified in this EA.

1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED

1.1.1 Navy Purpose and Need

Navy Statement of Purpose and Need

The Navy's purpose for the Proposed Action is to transfer excess property at the former NAS Alameda via a Federal-to-Federal (Fed-to-Fed) transfer to VA. The Navy's need for the Proposed Action is to comply with the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990, as amended (Public Law 101-510, 10 USC 2687 [1994]). As described below, the 1993 Defense Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) Commission recommended the closure of NAS Alameda.

Navy Project Background

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has been reducing its basing and staffing requirements to match current force structure plans. As part of the process to close and realign military bases, the BRAC Commission recommended that the Secretary of Defense "... close NAS Alameda, California." The BRAC Commission's recommendation was approved by President Bill Clinton and accepted by the 103rd Congress in October 1993. NAS Alameda closed in 1997.



Source: Data compiled by AECOM in 2012

Figure 1-1: Project Area, Former NAS Alameda, Alameda, California

In 1996, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) submitted a request for a portion of the land area that is the subject of VA's current request for property transfer. This property included a California Least Tern¹ (CLT) colony and surrounding lands (including submerged lands), and was identified by USFWS as a proposed area for a national wildlife refuge. During a period from 2000–2001, USFWS and the Navy attempted to negotiate a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the property transfer to occur in 2003, however, the agencies reached an impasse regarding transfer of this property. Subsequently, the Navy engaged in discussions with other Federal entities that had a long-term need to acquire lands to support their missions. VA expressed interest in the property and submitted a formal request for the property in 2006 through a Fed-to-Fed property transfer. The submerged lands considered for transfer in USFWS's prior property request are not included in the proposed Fed-to-Fed transfer to VA.

1.1.2 VA Purpose and Need

VA Statement of Purpose and Need

VA's purpose is to establish a single location for combined services consistent with the national "One VA" goal, which advocates consolidating services wherever possible to ensure that the most centralized, coordinated, and efficient care and services are provided to Veterans in a local area. VA's need for the Proposed Action is to serve, care for, honor, and memorialize Bay Area Veterans in a manner that addresses the area's current and future capacity needs and provides a greater range of services at one location.

VA Project Background

VA was established as an independent agency under Executive Order 5398 on July 21, 1930, and elevated to Cabinet level on March 15, 1989 (Public Law 100-527). As an agency, VA includes a central office in Washington, D.C., and field facilities throughout the nation, which are administered by three major administrations:

- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provides medical and social support services to Veterans.
- The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) administers financial programs and other forms of assistance to Veterans and their families.
- The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) provides Veterans a final resting place and commemorates their service to the nation.

All three of these administrations currently provide VA services in the Bay Area. However, VA facilities are undersized and lack necessary specialty services to serve the Bay Area's current and projected Veteran populations. Additionally, these services are provided in multiple locations within a radius of nearly 100 miles, thus often requiring Veterans to travel to different locations to receive necessary services and care.

The One VA goal allows VA to create synergies and realize operational efficiencies by closely aligning the physical spaces used for various VHA, VBA, and NCA functions and services. Synergies and operational efficiencies include using shared space to reduce duplicate facility and utility expenses, aligning staff and programs to increase efficiency, and improving accessibility to multiple services to meet Veterans' needs.

¹ The California Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum browni*) is a Federally-listed endangered migratory bird.

The following elements would serve the needs of Veterans by providing new facilities at the former NAS Alameda:

- *VHA*—An Outpatient Clinic (OPC), consisting of an Ambulatory Care Clinic, VA/DoD Ambulatory Surgery Center, and potentially a jointly staffed VA/U.S. Coast Guard Women’s Health Clinic, to serve Veterans in northern Alameda County.
- *VBA*—A VBA Outreach Office co-located with VHA and NCA services in the VA OPC building to provide benefit services to Veterans on site.
- *NCA*—A columbarium-only, above-ground VA National Cemetery for cremated remains, to serve the long-term interment needs of Bay Area Veterans.

Veterans Health Administration

The mission of the VHA branch of VA is to serve the needs of America’s Veterans by providing primary care, specialized care, and related medical and social support services. In fulfillment of this mission, VHA provides comprehensive, integrated healthcare services to Veterans and other eligible persons pursuant to the provisions of the Veterans’ Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-262) and related other statutory authority and regulations (Public Laws 107-135 and 110-329), the Veterans’ Benefits Improvement and Health Care Authorization Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-576), and the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-368).

The number of Veterans requiring VHA health benefits has grown during the last decade. The increase in the number of Veterans has resulted in a corresponding increase in demand for increased medical facilities on VA medical center campuses.

More than 9,000 Veterans are enrolled to use VHA’s clinical services in the Oakland/Alameda area; the number of patient visits has increased approximately 50% in the last five years. VHA currently operates two sites in Oakland that provide a variety of healthcare services: the Oakland OPC (the primary site) and the Oakland Behavioral Health (BH) Clinic. The Oakland OPC and BH Clinic are both located in buildings with leases due to expire after 2018. These facilities do not have the capacity to serve VHA’s current and future demands. The VHA needs a larger full-service outpatient clinic with mental health services as would be provided by the Proposed Action to meet these demands in the Alameda County area.

Veterans enrolled at the Oakland OPC who require specialty care and ambulatory surgical services that are not currently available at the Oakland facilities are typically referred to the Martinez OPC or the Sacramento VA Medical Center (approximately 24 and 92 miles away, respectively) for these services. The Proposed Action would provide a greater range of services at one location and reduce travel times in some cases.

Veterans Benefits Administration

The mission of the VBA branch of VA is to “to provide benefits and services to the Veterans and their families in a responsive, timely, and compassionate manner in recognition of their service to the Nation.” VBA administers programs that provide financial and other forms of assistance to Veterans, their dependents, and survivors. Major benefits include Veterans’ compensation, Veterans’ pension, survivors’ benefits, rehabilitation and employment assistance, education assistance, home loan guarantees, and life insurance coverage.

A recent growth in the population of Veterans has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for increased Veterans' benefits facilities. VBA has regional offices and intake sites around the nation. The VBA Oakland Regional Office is currently located in the Federal Building at 1301 Clay Street in Oakland. Under the Proposed Action, a VBA Outreach Office would be co-located with the VHA OPC to interface with the Oakland Regional Office providing more efficient coordination for staff and assistance for Veterans and their families at one location.

National Cemetery Administration

The mission of NCA is to honor the nation's Veterans with a final resting place in a national or state Veterans cemetery with lasting tributes to commemorate their service and sacrifice to the nation. NCA's strategic goal is to serve Veterans with burial options at VA national cemeteries or state Veterans cemeteries within 75 miles of their residence.

The two closest national cemeteries—the Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno and the San Francisco National Cemetery located within the Presidio in San Francisco—are closed and no longer accepting new interments. Currently the closest burial options for Bay Area Veterans are the San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery in Santa Nella (approximately 60 miles from Alameda) or the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon (approximately 120 miles from Alameda). A new National Cemetery is needed in Alameda to better serve Veterans and their families consistent with NCA's service goal.

1.2 PROJECT AREA

The project area, hereafter referred to as the VA Transfer Parcel, is located within the southwest corner of the former NAS Alameda property. The VA Transfer Parcel is comprised of the airfield area of the former NAS Alameda, which consists of inactive runways and support facilities. In addition, a California Least Tern colony is located within a 9.7-acre fenced area of the former airfield (see Figure 1-2).

The VA Transfer Parcel is bordered by the San Francisco Bay to the west and south, and the remainder of the former NAS Alameda property, now referred to as Alameda Point, to the east and north. The City of Alameda is located east of the VA Transfer Parcel and the City of Oakland is located farther to the northeast. The majority of the VA Transfer Parcel is located within Alameda County, but a small portion in the southwest corner of the parcel is located in San Francisco County. Regional vehicular access routes to the project area include Interstate 880, Interstate 980, and the Webster/Posey Tubes. Major arterial streets serving Alameda Point include Atlantic Avenue (Ralph Appezato Memorial Parkway), Willie Stargell Avenue, Pacific Avenue, Central Avenue, Webster Street, and Constitution Way.

Depending on the action alternative selected, the VA Transfer Parcel would be either approximately 549 acres (Alternative 1) or 624 acres (Alternative 2) in size. Both action alternatives would include an approximate 112-acre VA Development Area within the larger VA Transfer Parcel. The remaining acreage within the VA Transfer Parcel, including the CLT colony, would remain undeveloped. The VA would also construct an off-site access utility/road corridor on approximately 6 acres of land to the east of the VA Transfer Parcel. More information on the action alternatives is included in Chapter 2 (Alternatives).



Source: Data compiled by AECOM in 2012

Figure 1-2: Existing Conditions, Project Area, Alameda, California

1.3 NEPA PROCESS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

NEPA establishes an environmental review process for actions undertaken by Federal agencies. The review process is intended to help public officials make decisions based on an understanding of the environmental consequences and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment (40 CFR 1500.1). Further, the NEPA process recognizes the importance of public involvement in the agency decision-making process.

1.3.1 Public Scoping Period

In accordance with CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1506.6, “Public Involvement”), the Navy and VA initiated a scoping period in December 2008 by mailing and publishing a notice of public scoping to Federal, State, and local agencies, and members of the public known or expected to be interested in the Proposed Action. The purpose of the scoping period was to provide an opportunity for agencies and members of the public to comment on the potential environmental issues and concerns regarding the Proposed Action and to determine the scope of issues to be addressed in this EA.

The scoping period began on December 8, 2008 and ended on January 20, 2009 (total of 43 days). The public was invited and encouraged to provide scoping comments during this period. A scoping notice was published in three local newspapers: the *Alameda Sun*, the *Alameda Journal*, and the *Oakland Tribune*. Scoping notices were mailed to agencies and interested members of the public.

In addition, a public information meeting was held on December 18, 2008, at the *USS Hornet* Museum (707 West Hornet Avenue in Alameda). The meeting was conducted using a “town hall” format. Using this format, participants were able to ask questions and provide comments to VA and Navy personnel and other members of the project team. Approximately 66 people attended the meeting. Oral comments were received from 12 speakers at the scoping meeting. Written comment letters were subsequently received from 15 additional parties, including local agencies and interest groups. Comments received addressed a variety of concerns, including increased traffic; the effects of a community hospital and helipad that was initially proposed as part of the VA development; and the effect of the project on the CLT. Copies of the public information meeting notice, transcripts of the public meetings, and written comments received (requested personal information redacted) are included in Appendix A (EA Public Involvement).

Shortly after the public information meeting, on January 7, 2009, a presentation was made to the Alameda City Council, acting as the Alameda Reuse and Redevelopment Authority. In addition, several meetings were held with the Golden Gate Audubon Society and USFWS to discuss specific concerns related to the CLT, and possible ways that the project could be modified to address these concerns.

The Navy and VA considered the comments received during the scoping process to help determine the range of issues and alternatives to be evaluated in this Final EA. Further, based on agency and public concerns received during the scoping period, VA modified the total scale of development in its original 2008 Proposed Action, by eliminating a proposed VA hospital (250,000 gross square feet [gsf]) and helipad and by reducing the total area of office space.

1.3.2 Public Review of Draft EA

As part of the NEPA process, the Navy and VA released a Draft EA for a 56-day (February 22 - April 19, 2013) public review and comment period². During this time period, a total of three separate public meetings were held on two separate days. Each meeting was preceded by an open information session to allow interested individuals to review information presented in the Draft EA. Navy and VA representatives were available during the information session to provide clarification as necessary related to the Draft EA. The three meetings were held at the following locations:

1. March 14, 2013, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. - USS Hornet Museum, 707 W Hornet Avenue, Pier 3, Alameda, CA 94501;
2. March 14, 2013, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. - USS Hornet Museum, 707 W Hornet Avenue, Pier 3, Alameda, CA 94501;and
3. April 10, 2013, 4:00 – 7:00 p.m. - City of Alameda Albert H. Dewitt Officers' Club, 641 West Redline Avenue, Alameda, CA 94501.

Two Notices of Availability (NOAs) announcing the review period, public meetings, and extension of the public review period were published in local newspapers (*Alameda Times-Star*, *Oakland Tribune*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*) and mailed to Federal, State, and local agencies and interested members of the public. The NOAs are provided in Appendix A (EA Public Involvement). Electronic copies of the Draft EA were mailed to Federal, State, and local agencies and interested members of the public and posted to the Navy's BRAC Program Management Office Website (<http://www.bracpmo.navy.mil>) and VA's Website (<http://www.northerncalifornia.va.gov/planning/Alameda>). Electronic copies of the Draft EA were also provided to individuals by request, and hard copies made available for review at the following public locations:

1. City of Alameda Planning Division - 2263 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA 94501;
2. City of Alameda Public Library – Main - 1550 Oak Street, Alameda, CA 94501;
3. City of Alameda Public Library - Bay Farm Island Branch - 3221 Mecartney Road, Alameda, CA 94501;
4. City of Alameda Public Library - West End Branch - 788 Santa Clara Avenue, Alameda, CA 94501;
5. City of Oakland City Hall/Planning - Citywide Planning Main Office, 250 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Suite 3315, Oakland, CA 94612;
6. City of Oakland Library – Main - 125 14th Street, Oakland, CA 94612;
7. City of Oakland Library - Cesar E. Chavez Branch - 3301 East 12th Street, Oakland, CA 94601;
8. City of Oakland Library - 81st Avenue Branch - 1021 81st Avenue, Oakland, CA 94621;
9. City of Oakland Library - Dimond Branch - 3565 Fruitvale Avenue, Oakland, CA 94602;
10. City of Oakland Library - Eastmont Branch -7200 Bancroft, Ste 211, Oakland, CA 94605; and
11. San Francisco Public Library – Main - 100 Larkin St., San Francisco, 94102

The purpose of the review and comment period was to collect public comments on the Draft EA. Federal, State, and local agencies and members of the public were encouraged to review and comment on the Draft EA during the 56-day public review period. Attendance and participation at the meeting was not required to provide comments. Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as interested parties, were also encouraged to review and comment on the Draft EA by mail, fax, and email. VA and Navy received comments associated with 17 written

² Based on comments from the public, the review and comment period was extended from 30 days to 56 days, and a third public meeting was held on April 10, 2013.

letters, eight written comments provided during the public meetings, eight e-mails, and the three public meetings transcripts. Equal weight was given to all comments received regardless of method received.

The Final EA has been revised, as appropriate, in response to the public comments received during the review and comment period, which have been considered by VA and the Navy to evaluate the Proposed Action's alternatives and environmental impacts for purposes of making a final decision. All Draft EA comments received and the Navy and VA's responses are presented in Appendix A (EA Public Involvement).

1.3.3 Public Availability of Final EA

The Navy and VA have made this Final EA and the NEPA decision documents available to the public. An NOA announcing the availability of the Final EA and NEPA decision documents was published in the local newspapers (*Alameda Times-Star*, *Oakland Tribune*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*) and mailed to Federal, State, and local agencies and interested members of the public. Electronic copies of the Final EA and NEPA decision documents were mailed to Federal, State, and local agencies and interested members of the public and posted to VA's Website (<http://www.northerncalifornia.va.gov/planning/Alameda>). Electronic copies of the Final EA and NEPA decision documents were also provided to individuals by request, and hard copies made available at the same public locations that the Draft EA was made available (see Section 1.3.2 [Public Review of Draft EA] above).

1.4 SCOPE OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This Final EA evaluates the potential direct, indirect, short-term, and long-term impacts on the human and natural environment resulting from the Proposed Action. The Final EA also addresses potential cumulative impacts that may result from reasonably foreseeable projects in the region. The analysis of potential impacts is based on the full buildout of the Proposed Action. The Final EA documents the Navy's and VA's compliance with the requirements of NEPA, as amended and the CEQ regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500–1508).

Resource areas examined in this EA and potentially impacted include biological resources; water resources; transportation, traffic, circulation, and parking; cultural resources; visual resources and aesthetics; land use; air quality; greenhouse gas emissions and climate change; socioeconomics and environmental justice; hazards and hazardous substances; utilities; noise; public services; and geology and soils.

1.5 REGULATORY OVERVIEW AND REQUIRED FEDERAL PERMITS

The major Federal, State, and local regulatory requirements and Federal permits, licenses, and other entitlements that must be obtained in implementing the Proposed Action are presented in the individual resource sections in Chapter 3 (Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences).

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