

**DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICES
DEMOLITION OF 22 BUILDINGS AT THE HENRY A. WALLACE
BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER
BELTSVILLE, MARYLAND**

I. Name of the Action

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is proposing to remove 22 surplus buildings at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC). The purpose of the Proposed Action is to reduce long-term operational and maintenance costs and reduce BARC's impact on the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The 2015 *Reduce the Footprint Policy* (Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, 2015) mandates the aggressive disposal of surplus properties held by the Federal Government, make more efficient use of its real property assets, and reduce the total square footage of domestic office and warehouse inventory. This policy also required each agency to develop a Real Property Efficiency Plan describing each agency's strategic and tactical approach to managing its real property. The USDA's *Real Property Efficiency Plan for Fiscal Year 2019-2023* (USDA, 2018b) provides for the annual reduction of office and warehouse/storage square footage by one percent per fiscal year. USDA-ARS would also reduce its operational costs through compliance with BARC's municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit goal of achieving a 20-percent reduction of impervious surface area by 2025. Achieving this goal would support the potential redevelopment of certain BARC areas making the facility more sustainable and supportive of new and ongoing research opportunities.

II. Description of the Action

A. Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would demolish 22 buildings in their entirety, including the building envelopes, building footings and foundations, support systems (e.g., mechanical, electrical), site utilities servicing the buildings, concrete pads, and associated exterior concrete walkways and paved areas (e.g., drives and parking areas). All materials, equipment, and demolition debris would be removed from the site and properly disposed of according to material type and applicable State and Federal regulations. The buildings proposed for demolition are vacant and in various states of disrepair. In compliance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) *Technical Guidance on Implementing Stormwater Runoff Requirements for Federal Projects* under Section 438 of the Energy Independence and Security Act (EISA), building sites would be returned to predevelopment conditions, where feasible, resembling natural topography in order to promote natural surface drainage patterns. Due to the age of the overall facility and many of the building sites, preconstruction conditions may be difficult to determine. Recontouring of the sites once buildings are removed to achieve positive drainage is dependent upon the proximity of the site to occupied and active buildings and the maintenance of live utility connections and access routes to those occupied buildings. Each site would be seeded and mulched to minimize surface erosion while USDA-ARS determines if the site would be redeveloped or allowed to return to native vegetative cover.

B. Alternatives

Alternatives considered included No Action, Repair or Rehabilitation of the Buildings for Continued or Other Use, and Transfer of the Buildings for Use as Facilities to Assist the Homeless were eliminated because they do not satisfy the identified needs and purpose. Findings and conclusions of the No Action Alternative and the alternatives eliminated are provided in the Environmental Assessment (EA).

Although the No Action Alternative would avoid potential Proposed Action-related environmental effects, it would not fulfill the purpose of the Proposed Action nor support the potential redevelopment of certain BARC areas making the facility more sustainable and supportive of new and ongoing research opportunities.

III. Anticipated Environmental Effects

Potential environmental effects of the demolition of 22 buildings, including demolition-related activities such as mobilization, waste removal and disposal, and recontouring of the building sites along with the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures proposed are described below.

Using the No Action Alternative as the baseline for assessing potential effects from the Proposed Action, the following potential issues and concerns have been identified:

- Temporary and localized, but not significant, adverse effects on soils are expected due to the amount of land disturbance required to remove the identified buildings. These effects will be further minimized through the implementation of appropriate best management practices (BMPs) to prevent and manage soil erosion and stormwater flows from demolition and land contouring activities.
- Temporary and localized, but not significant, effects on air quality are expected from heavy equipment emissions and increases in fugitive dust and airborne particulates from construction and demolition-related activities.
- Adverse, but not significant, impacts to biological resources (vegetation) are expected as a result of the Proposed Action where shrub or tree clearing is required to facilitate building demolition and site contouring. However, any adverse effect would be mitigated through site restoration.
- Temporary and localized, but not significant, increases in ambient noise are expected during demolition-related activities.
- Utilities services would not be interrupted to active buildings during demolition.
- Temporary and localized, but not significant, increases in solid wastes would be generated during demolition.
- Local roadways and parking are adequate to support movement of construction equipment and materials to project sites and there would be a minor and temporary impact to traffic accessing BARC during demolition and waste removal.
- Adverse, but not significant, effects on hazardous materials would occur due to their presence within the buildings proposed for demolition and the need to categorize, remove, and dispose of each type of material in accordance with applicable local, state, and Federal regulations.

Using the No Action Alternative as the baseline for assessing potential effects, the following findings have been identified and are not expected to be affected by the Proposed Action:

- Water resources, including wetlands and floodplains are not expected to be affected by the Proposed Action because they are located relatively distant from each project site and the implementation of appropriate BMPs would protect against sedimentation, leaks, and spills. No fill would be placed within the Little Paint Branch floodplain associated with Building 053. The restoration of the site to preexisting conditions would improve water quality and reduce surface water runoff.

- Threatened and endangered species are not expected to be affected by the Proposed Action due to the lack of species and species habitat within or near the vicinity of the Proposed Action. Each project site will be surveyed for potential northern long-eared bat habitat prior to demolition.
- Land use impacts would be expected to be consistent with existing and future land use planning and increase meadows or forest and reduce mowed grass.
- No adverse effects to cultural resources are expected because the buildings proposed for demolition are considered non-contributing to the BARC Historic District, as determined by the Maryland Historical Trust, the State Historic Preservation Office. Demolition activities are not anticipated to affect any known or archaeological sites or areas of high archaeological potential.
- Socioeconomics within the vicinity of the BARC facility are not expected to be affected by the Proposed Action. Overall impacts to socioeconomics and environmental justice would be negligible and further analysis has been dismissed.
- The Proposed Action is not expected to result in significant cumulative effects when considered along with other, known projects anticipated at the BARC Facility.

Although no significant impacts to the environment are anticipated, the USDA-ARS would ensure the following mitigation measures are implemented to minimize potential effects. These measures would be implemented through provisions stipulated in demolition/construction contracts. The potentially adverse environmental impacts related to the construction, operation, and dismantling of these structures and buildings through the Proposed Action would be minimized, mitigated and controlled to acceptable levels by implementation of the following measures:

- USDA-ARS will require the contractor to use dust abatement measures, such as wetting, mulching, or seeding exposed areas, where appropriate, to address any air quality concerns.
- USDA-ARS will require the contractor to mitigate vehicle emissions impacts as much as possible by prohibiting truck idling.
- USDA-ARS will require the contractor to provide lay down (i.e., temporary material storage) areas for demolition equipment and materials within existing cleared and paved areas to minimize disturbance to existing land and vegetation.
- USDA-ARS will require contractor compliance with erosion and sediment control measures related to stabilization of disturbed areas.
- USDA-ARS will require the contractor to provide and maintain silt fencing, or other suitable BMPs, to be placed around demolition areas to mitigate erosion and sediment runoff.
- USDA-ARS will require the contractor to implement BMPs for erosion/sediment control and stormwater management to minimize impacts to the existing stormwater collection system, wetlands, and other environmental resources.
- USDA-ARS will require all necessary measures be taken by the contractor to prevent, control, and mitigate the release of oils, trash, debris, and other pollutants to air, water and land.
- USDA-ARS will require contractors to safely handle and dispose of solid and hazardous waste in accordance with applicable local, state and Federal regulations.
- USDA-ARS will require contractors to provide appropriate health and safety training, precautions and other protection for their workers.

- USDA-ARS will require contractors to recycle or reuse materials to the greatest extent possible, and to dispose of construction debris in accordance with local, state, and Federal waste disposal regulations.
- USDA-ARS will require, in the event that unexpected cultural resources were found during construction activities, the contractor to stop work and allow USDA-ARS to consult with the Maryland Historic Trust (MHT).
- USDA-ARS will require that the transportation of demolition equipment and materials over local roads be scheduled to occur after peak traffic periods, whenever possible.
- USDA-ARS will require contractors to minimize demolition-related noise impacts by limiting demolition-related activities to the hours between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on weekdays.
- USDA-ARS will require that, upon commencement, demolition be executed expeditiously to minimize the period of disturbance to the affected environment.

Careful design, the use of good engineering and best management practices, and the implementation of certain operational procedures will avoid, minimize, or mitigate these minor and moderate potential adverse effects presented in the EA to a less than significant level.

IV. Public Involvement

The Draft EA is available for a 30-day public review period – January 30, 2020 through February 28, 2020; and public notices were published in the Prince George’s Sentinel, Prince George’s Post, Greenbelt News Review. The Draft EA and Finding of No Significant Impact were made available for public review at the following locations; BARC, 10300 Baltimore Avenue, Building 003, Room 009, Beltsville, MD 20705, and the Beltsville Branch of the Prince George’s County Memorial Library, 4319 Sellman Road, Beltsville, MD 20705. These documents are also available on the ARS website <https://www.ars.usda.gov/northeast-area/> to notify interested persons and organizations of the availability of the Draft EA and FONSI for public review and comment.

Additionally, the Draft EA and Finding of No Significant Impact were sent directly to Federal, state, and local agencies and other interested parties; reference Appendix E of the Draft EA for the distribution list.

Affidavits of publication will be provided in the Appendix of the Final EA. The deadline for public comment on this Proposed Action is the February 28, 2020.

V. Facts and Conclusions

Implementation of the mitigation measures discussed above and in the respective sections of the EA would reduce the potential effects of the Proposed Action, resulting in no significant adverse impacts to the environment. An Environmental Impact Statement is, therefore, not required.

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Date: