



**CONSTITUTION GARDENS REHABILITATION**  
**PHASE 1**

The National Mall  
Washington, DC

September 21, 2015

Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR, Parts 1500-1508), and the National Capital Planning Commission's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, I have evaluated Phase 1 of the Rehabilitation of Constitution Gardens as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.43(38.00)44225; and the Rehabilitation of Constitution Gardens environmental assessment (EA) prepared by the National Park Service. The EA is incorporated into this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) by reference. Based on the foregoing, I have determined that Phase 1 of the Preferred Alternative – Regenerative Garden will not have a significant impact on the human environment.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to rehabilitate Constitution Gardens to improve the functionality, ecology, visitor services, and accessibility of the area, as envisioned in the 2010 National Mall Plan.

The project is needed because Constitution Gardens, in its present condition, has poor soil conditions, and poor drainage is affecting the site's vegetation. Walkways are in fair to poor condition. Pedestrian circulation can be confusing and does not meet capacity in some places, and in some areas does not meet the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards of 1968 for universal accessibility. In addition, vehicular turning movements at the intersection of Constitution Avenue and 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW are difficult. Constitution Gardens is also underused by park visitors due to lack of public amenities and limited recreational opportunities.

Proposed Action

The National Park Service proposes to rehabilitate Constitution Gardens to create an accessible, purposeful and flexible place that blends ecological function and socially vibrant spaces. The project is divided into two phases. Phase 1 involves improvements to the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Constitution Avenue and includes both permanent and temporary improvements. The permanent work includes the relocation and rehabilitation of the Lockkeeper's House, a new entry plaza adjacent to the Lockkeeper's House, and the construction of a perimeter garden wall. The

temporary work includes an arcing path which will lead from the new entry plaza to the existing plaza located on the east end of the lake as well as plantings on both sides of the new path.

Phase 2 is not included in this FONSI, and has not been submitted for NCPC's review and action. Phase 2 will address the remaining portion of Constitution Gardens with the exception of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which is not included in the project area. Primary elements of Phase 2 include improvements to the lake including a new lake ring, a new pavilion at the east end of the lake, improved access to the Memorial to the 56 Signers of the Declaration of Independence, widening and realignment of walkways in the garden, soil remediation, modifications to the intersection radius, crosswalks, and signs at the southwest corner of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Constitution Avenue, new site furnishings, improved recreational opportunities, and upgrades to the utility systems.

In addition to the preferred alternative described below, the EA analyzed the following alternatives: No Action Alternative; Alternative 1: Sustainable Garden; and Alternative 2: Social Garden. NCPC is issuing this FONSI on Phase 1 of the Preferred Alternative: Regenerative Garden.

Preferred Alternative: Regenerative Garden - This alternative has been identified as the preferred alternative and will include the relocation of the Lockkeeper's House and a full rehabilitation of the building in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. The building will be used for visitor education, park management, and donor recognition. Along with the relocation of the Lockkeeper's House, Phase 1 improvements include the construction of a new arrival plaza and associated landscaping. The new arrival plaza will be framed by a perimeter wall which will be 17 inches tall and 36 inches wide. A large willow oak will provide shade for the plaza.

An arcing path is proposed from the new entry plaza to the existing plaza on the east end of the lake. The path will be 18 feet wide. The path will be concrete at the center and flanked by stone bands. A line of overcup oak trees will provide shade on the path and there will be 10 benches and a Washington Globe light fixture between every other tree.

On either side of the arcing path, the planting plan establishes a new plant palette for this portion of the National Mall. Both the scale of the planting and species selection represent a departure from the existing conditions of this area as primarily a turf/open lawn interspersed with trees. The proposed idea is to diversify the plant palette which improves the ecological function of the park and introduces a new aesthetic to Constitution Gardens for visual interest throughout the seasons. A combination of canopy and flowering understory trees will be planted along with native grasses and meadow plantings. Along with the new plantings, the soil will be remediated to address its poor condition.

#### Standard for evaluation

Under NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, and NCPC Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, an EA is sufficient and an Environmental Impact Statement need not be prepared if the EA supports the finding that the major

federal action will not significantly affect the human environment. The EA for this project was prepared in accordance with this standard.

### Potential Impacts

No significant impacts were identified that will require analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement. Soils, vegetation, water resources, visual resources, visitor use and experience, traffic and circulation, and park management will experience beneficial and adverse impacts as a result of the preferred alternative. Cultural resources will experience negligible to moderate adverse impacts. Impacts on affected resources are summarized below:

Soils: The preferred alternative will result in short term, moderate adverse impacts on soils from construction and excavation activities. Localized ground disturbance would result from relocation of the Lockkeeper's House and construction of new infrastructure and facilities. There will be long term, negligible, adverse impacts on soils from visitor use. There will also be long term, beneficial impacts to soils from the remediation resulting in improved soil quality, soil stabilization, and nutrient cycling.

Vegetation: The preferred alternative will result in short-term, negligible to minor and long term, negligible adverse impacts from the removal of trees and understory vegetation during construction activities. There will be long term, minor adverse impacts resulting from the removal and replacement of some mature healthy trees as new trees would take time to mature. Planting of new trees, diversification of the vegetation, and improved soil conditions would result in long term, beneficial impacts. Soil remediation and improvement to drainage along with removal of unhealthy trees would result in a healthier tree community and long term, beneficial impacts.

Water Resources: Improved soils will provide a better growing medium for plants, and a drainage system that will be installed to capture stormwater and improve filtration of stormwater into the soils. Harvesting stormwater will reduce the volume discharged in the combined sewer system, and improvements to soils and the infiltration capacity of those soils will reduce the volume of water discharged. Short term, negligible to minor construction-related impacts related to exposed soils will be managed with accepted sediment and soil erosion control practices.

Visual Resources: The preferred alternative will result in long term, beneficial impacts to visual resources through the introduction of a varied planting palette. There will be changes to views and vistas due to the removal of trees, addition of new trees, and the introduction of new plant species resulting in minor to moderate, long term, adverse impacts.

Visitor Use and Experience: The preferred alternative will result in long term, beneficial impacts on visitor experience due to improved pedestrian circulation and accessibility, additional opportunities for enjoyment and education, a strong identity, improved visitor facilities, and increased visibility and visitor safety, all of which will help to increase visitation to Constitution Gardens. There will be short term, moderate adverse impacts on visitor use and experience as a result of the closure of the park during construction.

Traffic and Transportation: The preferred alternative will result in short term, minor to moderate adverse impacts to bicyclists and pedestrians during construction due to temporary closure of

sidewalks. To mitigate this impact, NPS will post signage to direct pedestrians and bicyclists to safe passages adjacent to Constitution Gardens. Impacts will be limited to pedestrian and bicycle facilities that travel through the interior and along the perimeter of the gardens. There will be long term, beneficial impacts to vehicles due to improved sight lines from the relocation of the Lockkeeper's House.

Park Management and Operations: The preferred alternative will result in long term, beneficial impacts on park operations, management, utilities, and infrastructure, primarily as a result of the implementation of sustainable practices. There may be a need for additional specialty staff to manage the new plant species resulting in moderate, adverse impacts on park staffing and budget, but the benefit of having skilled professionals on staff will outweigh the costs in terms of long term park operations.

Cultural Resources: The preferred alternative will result in long term, beneficial as well as minor to moderate adverse impacts on the Lockkeeper's House. The relocation of the building will result in impacts on its integrity of location. The preferred alternative will also have long term, negligible to moderate, adverse impacts to the Constitution Gardens cultural landscape. The preferred alternative may have permanent, moderate adverse impacts on known and potential archaeological resources present in Constitution Gardens. The Lockkeeper's House relocation has the potential to have moderate impacts on Lock B of the Washington City Canal. To address the adverse impacts to cultural resources (adverse effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act), NPS, NCPC, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Trust for the National Mall entered into a Memorandum of Agreement.

/// ORIGINAL SIGNED ///

Marcel C. Acosta  
Executive Director