FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
PROPOSED HANCOCK COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER PROJECT
HANCOCK COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI
GRANTS PROGRAM DIRECTORATE
FEMA 2008-EO-TS-0004 (1)

BACKGROUND

In accordance with 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for FEMA, Subpart B, Agency Implementing Procedures, Part 10.9, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared pursuant to Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as implemented by the regulations promulgated by the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ; 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508). The purpose of the proposed project is to relocate the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to an area further from the coast to limit damages from future events and allow for continuous operations during and in the aftermath of a disaster in Hancock County, Mississippi. An EA was prepared to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

The Hancock County Board of Supervisors (BOS) has applied for EOC program funding under application number 2008-EO-T8-0004 (1). FEMA provides funds under this program to improve emergency management and preparedness capabilities by supporting flexible, sustainable, secure, and interoperable EOCs with a focus on addressing identified deficiencies and needs.

Two project alternatives were explored in depth in the EA for the construction of the Hancock County EOC: 1) No Action and 2) Preferred Action Alternative:

Under the preferred action alternative, the Hancock County BOS proposes to construct a new EOC on a 10-acre parcel owned by the Hancock County BOS. The proposed project site is located 7 miles north of Interstate 10 in Highway 603 in the Kiln Community of Hancock County, Mississippi. This parcel of land is a half mile north of Highway 43, bordered to the east by Highway 603, and to the south by County Road 416. The constructed facility will be an 11,250-square-foot, one-story space. The EOC will accommodate approximately 75 EOC staff and any essential personnel before, during, and after any disaster event. This structure will also serve as the permanent space for the County EMA. Under the No Action alternative, the EOC would continue to operate out of a temporary facility, adversely affecting the EOC personnel's ability to function efficiently and to adequately meet the needs of the citizens in a post-disaster environment.

A public notice was posted in the *Sun Herald* on September 12 and 19, 2010. The draft EA is also available online at the http://www.fema.gov/plan/ehp/envdocuments/ea-region4.shtm website. The public was invited to comment on the proposed action and the draft EA.

FINDINGS

Based on input and consultations with the Federal and State resource agencies, and other identified sources documented in the attached EA and in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act FEMA regulations (44 CFR Part 10) for environmental considerations, and executive orders on floodplains (EO 11988), wetlands (EO 11990), and environmental justice (EO 12898), FEMA has found that preferred project with the prescribed mitigation measures as defined in the EA will have no significant impact on the natural or human environment. All short-term impacts require utilizing best management practices to minimize and mitigate adverse impacts to the proposed project site and surrounding areas.

CONDITIONS

The Hancock County BOS shall comply with all prescribed conditions set forth in the EA, including but not limited to the following conditions. Failure to comply with these conditions may jeopardize the receipt of Federal funding.

1. Any change to the approved scope of work will require re-evaluation for compliance with NEPA and other Laws and Executive Orders.
2. In accordance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations, the applicant is responsible for acquiring any necessary permits prior to commencing construction at the preferred project site. All permit conditions or Best Management Practices must be followed.
3. If ground disturbing activities occur during construction, applicant will monitor ground disturbance and if any potential archeological resources are discovered, will immediately cease construction in that area and notify the State and FEMA.
4. Excavated soil and waste materials will be managed and disposed of in accordance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations. If contaminated materials are discovered during the construction activities, the work will cease until the appropriate procedures and permits can be implemented.
5. If the preferred action will require additional excavation to groundwater depths, the Hancock BOS would be required to coordinate with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to identify appropriate mitigation.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the EA, coordination with the appropriate agencies, comments from the public, and adherence to the project conditions set forth in this FONSI, FEMA has determined that the proposed project qualifies as a major Federal action that will not significantly adversely affect the quality of the natural and human environment, nor does it have the potential for significant adverse cumulative effects. As a result of this FONSI, an EIS will not be prepared (44 CFR Part 10.9) and the preferred actions as described in the attached EA may proceed.

APPROVAL

William R. Straw, Ph.D.
Regional Environmental Officer

Date 01/13/11

Draft Environmental Assessment

Hancock County Emergency Operations Center

FEMA-1604-DR-MS

Hancock County, Mississippi

September 2010

FEMA

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACHP	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
amsl	above mean sea level
APE	area of potential effects
BMP	Best Management Practice
BOS	Board of Supervisors
CAA	Clean Air Act
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CO	carbon monoxide
CWA	Clean Water Act
dB	decibel
DNL	Day-Night Average Sound Level
EA	Environmental Assessment
EDR	Environmental Data Resources, Inc.
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EMA	Emergency Management Agency
EMS	Environmental Management Services
EO	Executive Order
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
ESA	Environmental Site Assessment
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHBM	Flood Hazard Boundary Map
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Map
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FPPA	Farmland Protection Policy Act
HMGP	Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
MDAH	Mississippi Department of Archives and History
MDEQ	Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality
MDOT	Mississippi Department of Transportation

mph	miles per hour
MSWCC	Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NFIP	National Flood Insurance Program
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NO2	nitrogen dioxide
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
O3	ozone
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Pb	lead
PM2.5	particulate matter less than 2.5 microns
PM10	particulate matter less than 10 microns
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SO2	sulfur dioxide
SWPPP	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Office
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey

SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast, causing extensive damage. Subsequently, a Presidential Disaster Declaration, FEMA-1604-DR-MS, was signed for Katrina.

1.1 PROJECT AUTHORITY

The Hancock County Mississippi Board of Supervisors (BOS) has applied to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for assistance with a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) project under subapplication number HMGP 1604 MM#373. FEMA's HMGP provides grants to State and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster declaration. The purpose of the HMGP is to reduce the loss of life and property due to natural disasters and to enable mitigation measures to be implemented during the immediate recovery from a disaster. The HMGP is authorized under Section 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. FEMA proposes to provide assistance for this project through the HMGP under Presidential Disaster Declaration FEMA-1604-DR-MS.

In accordance with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, PL 93-288, as amended, and implementing regulations at 44 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 206, FEMA is required to review the environmental effects of the proposed action prior to making a funding decision. This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with FEMA's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations found in 44 CFR Part 10. The purpose of the EA is to analyze the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project, and to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

1.2 PROJECT LOCATION

Hancock County is located in the southwestern part of Mississippi, along the Gulf of Mexico. The county is semi-urban and rural and the county seat is Bay St. Louis. The Hancock County BOS has approved the relocation of the Hancock County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to a 10-acre parcel located 7 miles north of Interstate 10 on Highway 603 in the City of Kiln, Hancock County, Mississippi. This parcel of land is a half mile north of Highway 43 and is bordered to the east by Highway 603 and to the south by County Road 416 (see Figure 1 in Appendix A).

1.3 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project would provide a permanent and safe location for the County's emergency personnel, giving them the ability to provide protective and life saving measures to the citizens of Hancock County when natural or man-made hazardous conditions arise.

SECTION TWO PURPOSE AND NEED

The objective of FEMA's HMGP is to assist communities in recovering from damage caused by severe storm events and natural disasters. The purpose of the proposed project is to provide the emergency service agencies in Hancock County with a safe, permanent structure in which to assist the citizens of the county in the aftermath of any man-made or natural disaster event.

Hurricane Katrina came ashore in Hancock County Mississippi at approximately 10:00 a.m. on August 29, 2005, as a Category 2 hurricane with maximum winds of 110 mile per hour (mph) and gusts to 145 mph. Hancock County Emergency Management Agency officials estimated that every structure south of Interstate 10 had flood damage.

Hurricane Katrina's storm surge severely damaged the Hancock County EOC located in the Justice Court building adjacent to Highway 90 and west of Dunbar Street in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. The single story building was inundated by approximately 4 to 5 feet of water, forcing the EOC staff to abandon the building after the event and leaving the county with limited ability to direct emergency personnel after the storm. Due to the damages sustained and the subsequent mold growth, the EOC building has been rendered uninhabitable. After a re-mapping of the floodplain, the existing EOC building is now surrounded by the 100-year floodplain (Flood Insurance Rate Map [FIRM] panel number 28045C0354D, dated October 16, 2009).

During a storm event this area is cut off from the rest of the city and the operations center's ability to protect the citizens of Hancock County is compromised. In addition, FEMA requires that all critical facilities (such as the EOC) be located outside of the 500-year floodplain.

Since Katrina, the EOC has operated out of several different temporary locations. Currently, the EOC operates out of a former county building on Cuevas Town Road in Kiln; this facility is inadequate for the EOC's needs.

The Hancock County BOS has approved the relocation of the EOC to an area outside the 500-year floodplain and north of Interstate 10 in the community of Kiln. This location will serve the many Hancock County residents who relocated north of the surge inundation zone after Katrina, creating an increased demand for additional public facilities in northern Hancock County. The purpose of this project is to provide a permanent and safe location for the County's emergency personnel, giving them the ability to provide protective and life-saving measures to the citizens of Hancock County when natural or man-made hazardous conditions arise.

SECTION THREE ALTERNATIVES

This section describes the alternatives that were considered in addressing the purpose and need stated in Section Two. In this EA, two alternatives are evaluated: the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative, construction of a new EOC building. Alternative sites located on the Stennis Airport property were considered and dismissed as not feasible.

3.1 ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative, the EOC would continue to operate out of a temporary facility, adversely affecting the EOC personnel's ability to function efficiently and to adequately meet the needs of the citizens in a post-disaster environment.

3.2 ALTERNATIVE 2: RELOCATE AND REBUILD THE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER (PROPOSED ACTION)

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, a new EOC would be constructed on a 10-acre parcel owned by the Hancock County BOS. The proposed project site is located 7 miles north of Interstate 10 on Highway 603 in the City of Kiln, Hancock County, Mississippi. This parcel of land is a half mile north of Highway 43, bordered to the east by Highway 603, and to the south by County Road 416 (see Figure 2 in Appendix A). Photographs of the proposed project site are contained in Appendix B.

The EOC will accommodate approximately 75 EOC staff and any essential personnel before, during, and after any disaster event. The constructed facility will be an 11,250 square-foot one-story space, including an attached storm shelter. All aspects of FEMA's 361 storm sheltering requirements will be considered including backup water/sewage, backup power generators, restroom facilities, and other sheltering necessities. Once completed, the building will withstand up to 3-second gusts of 200 mph winds. The new EOC will also provide permanent space for the County Emergency Management Agency (EMA). Primary access to the new EOC would be from the south on Highway 603; secondary access would be from County Road 416.

Approximately 10 acres of scrub type vegetation would be cleared to construct the EOC. The EOC would connect to existing utilities along Highway 603. Construction of this proposed project is anticipated to take 12 months after design, award, and permitting has been completed.

3.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND DISMISSED

The Hancock County BOS considered 5 to 6 alternative sites located on or near the Stennis Airport property. However, these sites were either located within the floodplain or within wetland areas. Therefore, these sites were not considered feasible and were dismissed from further consideration.

SECTION FOUR AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND IMPACTS

The following table summarizes the potential impacts of the Proposed Action Alternative and conditions or mitigation measures to offset those impacts. Following the summary table, any resource areas for which potential impacts were identified, as well as high-priority resources, including floodplains, Waters of the United States, environmental justice, biological resources, and cultural resources, will be discussed in greater detail.

Table 1: Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action Alternative

Affected Environment	Impacts	Mitigation
Geology and Soils	No impacts to underlying geologyare anticipated. There would be short-term, minorimpacts to soils during utility trenching activities.	A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP)would be prepared prior to construction. Implementation of appropriate best management practices (BMPs) would be required, including theinstallation of silt fences and revegetation of soils. Excavated soil and waste materials would be managed and disposed of in accordance with applicable local, State, and Federal regulations. If contaminated materials are discovered during theconstruction activities, the work will cease until the appropriate procedures and permits can be implemented.
Surface Water	Construction of the primary site access road would impact approximately 25 feet of existing drainage ditch. There may also be short-term impacts to downstream surface waters during construction.	A SWPPP must be prepared and a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit must be obtained prior to construction; appropriate BMPs, such as installing silt fences and revegetating bare soils, would minimize runoff.
Groundwater	No impacts to groundwater are anticipated.	None.
Floodplains	No impacts to regulatory floodplainare anticipated.	None.
Waters of the UnitedStates Including Wetlands	No wetland impacts are anticipated.	None.

Affected Environment	Impacts	Mitigation
Transportation	There would be temporary increases in traffic volumes on Highway 603 and County Road 416during construction due to increased construction traffic. County Road 416 may be partially closed during construction activities. No long-term transportation impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed action.	Construction vehicles and equipment would be stored on site during project construction, and appropriate signage would be posted on affectedroadways.
Environmental Justice	All populations would benefit fromthe Proposed Action.	None.
Air Quality	There would be short-term, minor impacts to air quality during the construction period.	Construction contractors would be required to water down construction areas when necessary;fuel-burning equipment running times would bekept to a minimum; engines would be properly maintained.
Noise	There would be short-term, minor impacts to noise levels at the proposed project site during the construction period.	Construction would take place during normalbusiness hours and equipment would meet alllocal, State, and Federal noise regulations.
Biological Resources/Threatened and Endangered Species	Approximately 10 acres of uplandshrub vegetation would be clearedfor construction of the facility. No impacts to any federally protected species are anticipated.	None.

Affected Environment	Impacts	Mitigation
Cultural Resources	No impacts to archaeological or cultural resources are anticipated.	In the event that archaeological deposits, includingany Native American pottery, stone tools, or human remains are uncovered, the project would be halted. The applicant would stop all work immediately in the vicinity of the discovery and take reasonable measures to avoid or minimize harm to the finds. All archaeological findings will be secured and access to the sensitive area restricted. The applicant would inform FEMA immediately and FEMA will consult with the StateHistoric Preservation Office (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) and Tribes. Work in sensitive areas cannot resume until consultation is completed and appropriate measures have been taken to ensure that the project is in compliance with the National HistoricPreservation Act (NHPA).
Hazardous Materials	No hazardous materials or waste impacts are anticipated.	Any hazardous materials discovered, generated, orused during construction would be disposed of andhandled in accordance with applicable local, State,and Federal regulations.
Safety	Positive impacts to public safety areanticipated because residents wouldhave a new, permanent EOC building that would allow emergency management personnel to respond to disaster events.	All construction activities would be performed using qualified personnel and in accordance with the standards specified in Occupational Safety andHealth Administration (OSHA) regulations; appropriate signage and barriers should be in place prior to construction activities to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities.
SocioeconomicResources	No adverse socioeconomic impactsare anticipated.	None.

4.1 GEOLOGY AND SOILS

The general project area is within a physiographic region of Mississippi called the East Gulf Coastal Plain. The East Gulf Coastal Plain extends from the Florida Parishes of Louisiana over most of Mississippi, some of western Tennessee and Kentucky, the southwestern two-thirds of Alabama, and the western panhandle of Florida. Its southern boundary is the Gulf of Mexico and its western boundary the drop into the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (BLM 2009). The proposed

project site is located approximately 90 feet above mean sea level (amsl) and consists of Poarch fine sandy loam (USGS 2010).

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) online Web Soil Survey, soils on the proposed project site consist of the Poarch fine sandy loam. These soils are characterized by deep, well- and moderately well-drained, moderately permeable soils on uplands that formed in unconsolidated sandy and loamy marine sediments. They are saturated in the lower part in late winter and early spring. Surface soils consist primarily of medium- to very fine-grained sands, silts, and silty clays. The sands tend to be light to dark gray, white, brown, or red, depending on the degree of weathering. Slopes range from 2 to 5 percent (USDA/NRCS 2009).

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) states that Federal agencies must "minimize the extent to which Federal programs contribute to the unnecessary conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses…" The NRCS is responsible for protecting significant agricultural lands from irreversible conversions that result in the loss of an essential food or environmental resource. Prime farmland is characterized as land with the best physical and chemical characteristics for the production of food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. This land either is used for food or fiber crops or is available for those crops, and not urban, built-up land, or a water area. The soil qualities, growing season, and moisture supply are those needed for a well-managed soil to economically produce a sustained, high yield of crops. According to the NRCS online Web Soil Survey, Poarch fine sandy loams are designated as prime farmland. (USDA/NRCS 2009).

A site visit conducted by a FEMA Environmental Specialist and Archaeologist on March 3, 2010, identified that the proposed site had been previously disturbed by agriculture and recent grubbing. The site was used as residential farm land with a home on the property prior to the 1960s, but no evidence of its existence remains except for a few scattered bricks in the northeast corner of the site. This finding was corroborated by the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) performed by Environmental Management Services (EMS). Their report stated that the proposed property was previously used as residential farm land (EMS 2010).

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to geology or soils.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, construction of the proposed building would require temporary impacts to the soil during the period of construction. Trenching activities associated with the installation of utilities and drainage would not typically exceed 3 feet below grade. As a result, construction activities are not anticipated to be deep enough to impact underlying geologic resources.

To minimize erosion, appropriate BMPs would be implemented throughout the project area. BMPs could include the installation of silt fences and the revegetation of disturbed soils to minimize the potential for erosion. Excavated soil and waste materials will be managed and disposed of in accordance with applicable local, State, and Federal regulations. If contaminated materials are discovered during the construction activities, the work will cease until the appropriate procedures and permits can be implemented.

The applicant would be required to obtain an NPDES permit from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and to prepare a SWPPP prior to construction; this SWPPP must include BMPs to minimize erosion of soils from the construction area and reduce offsite sediment transport.

Because the project site once contained a residence, it is exempt from the FPPA (USDA/NRCS 2010). Consultation letters were sent to the NRCS and the Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission (MSWCC) on July 20, 2010, requesting their review of the proposed project (Appendix C). To date, no responses have been received.

4.2 WATER RESOURCES

4.2.1 Surface Water

The Clean Water Act (CWA), as amended in 1977, established the basic framework for regulating discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States.

The proposed project site topography is level with a moderate slope to the south. A ditch extends along one edge of the proposed project site, adjacent to Highway 603. Elevations of the site range from 85 to 95 feet amsl. The proposed project site is located approximately 1,000 feet to the north of an unnamed stream; several farm ponds are located to the south and west.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to surface water.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, approximately 25 feet of the ditch would be impacted by construction of the main access road. Possible temporary impacts to downstream surface waters may occur during the construction period due to soil erosion resulting from construction activities. Additionally, should impacts from stormwater discharge affect downstream waters, the applicant may be required to prepare a SWPPP and obtain a NPDES permit. To reduce impacts to surface water, the applicant would implement appropriate BMPs, such as installing silt fences and revegetating bare soils.

A consultation letter requesting agency review and comment was sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on July 20, 2010 (Appendix C). To date, no response has been received.

4.2.2 Groundwater

The proposed project site is located in an area where groundwater is dominated by the Miocene and Pliocene system, geological formations that run along most of the Mississippi coast. Within these freshwater bearing sands one unconfined aquifer is found near the surface with ten or more confined aquifers ranging in thickness from 100 to 450 feet (USGS 2009).

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to groundwater.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, construction activities would not reach a sufficient depth to impact groundwater. If the proposed action will require

additional excavation to groundwater depths, the applicant will consult with EPA and MDEQ to identify appropriate mitigation.

4.2.3 Floodplains

Floodplains refer to the 100-year floodplain as defined by FEMA, and are shown on FIRMs or Flood Hazard Boundary Maps (FHBMs) for all communities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The 100-year floodplain designates the area inundated during a storm having a 1-percent chance of occurring in any given year.

Executive Order (EO) 11988 (Floodplain Management) requires Federal agencies to avoid direct or indirect support of development within the 100-year floodplain whenever there is a practicable alternative. Consistent with EO 11988, FIRMs were examined during the preparation of this EA. The entire proposed project site is located in Flood Zone X, outside both the 100-year and 500-year flood zones (Map Number 28045C0241D; FEMA 2009).

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to the floodplain.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, no impacts to the floodplain are anticipated because the proposed project site is located outside of the 100- and 500-year floodplain.

4.2.4 Waters of the United States Including Wetlands

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regulates the discharge of dredged and fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands, pursuant to Section 404 of the CWA. Additionally, EO 11990 (Protection of Wetlands) requires Federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, adverse impact to wetlands.

The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) enables coastal States, including Mississippi, to designate State coastal zone boundaries and develop coastal management programs to improve protection of sensitive shoreline resources and guide sustainable use of coastal areas. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the proposed project site is located within the Mississippi Coastal Zone (NOAA 2010).

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no construction and no impacts to waters of the United States, including wetlands, would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, construction of the EOC building and parking areas would not impact waters of the United States. This activity will not require a USACE permit.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) map, there are no wetlands located within the proposed project area (USFWS 2009). A site visit on March 3, 2010, by a FEMA Environmental Specialist confirmed that no wetlands are present within the proposed project site. No wetland impacts are anticipated.

A consultation letter, dated July 20, 2010, was submitted to the USACE Mobile District and the Wetlands Permitting Section of Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) requesting agency review and comments regarding the proposed project. A response letter from the USACE Mobile District, dated August 25, 2010, stated that the proposed project site contains no jurisdictional wetlands and no USACE permit would be required for construction (Appendix C). In a response letter dated July 27, 2010, MDMR stated that the Department has no objections provided there are no direct or indirect impacts to coastal wetlands and no coastal program agency objects to the proposal (Appendix C).

4.3 TRANSPORTATION

The proposed project site is located on a 10-acre parcel owned by the Hancock County BOS. The site is located 7 miles north of Interstate 10 on Highway 603 in Kiln. This parcel of land is ½ mile north of Highway 43, bordered to the east by Highway 603, and to the south by County Road 416. Highway 603 is a 13-mile-long, rural, two-lane road that extends south to north from Highway 43 to Highway 53.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to transportation.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, there would be a minor temporary increase in the volume of construction traffic on roads in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project site that could potentially result in a slower traffic flow during the construction phase. To mitigate potential delays, construction vehicles and equipment would be stored on site during project construction, and appropriate signage would be posted on affected roadways.

Additionally, traffic devices including turn lanes, lights and/or signage may have to be installed at the intersection of Highway 603 and County Road 416. Speed limits may also be decreased during selected times, especially during EOC operational periods.

No long-term transportation impacts are anticipated as the result of the proposed project. A consultation letter, dated July 20, 2010, was submitted to the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) requesting agency review and comments regarding the proposed project (Appendix C). No response has been received from MDOT to date.

4.4 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

EO 12898 (Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations) mandates that Federal agencies identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations.

According to the 2000 Census, the Kiln Community has a population of 2,040 individuals. In 1999, the median household income reported in the community was $38,125, with 19.5 percent of individuals living below the poverty level. The median household income reported in all of Hancock County was $43,491, with 17.4 percent of individuals living below the poverty level.

The median household income in the State of Mississippi was $37,818, with 20.8 percent of individuals living below the poverty level (USCB 2000).

Minorities represented 3.6 percent, 12.5 percent, and 41.6 percent, respectively, of the Kiln Community, Hancock County, and the State of Mississippi populations. In the Kiln Community, 28.5 percent of citizens over the age of 5 are living with a disability. Comparatively, 26.3 percent of people in Hancock County, and 20.6 percent of people in the State of Mississippi, are living with a disability.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, construction would not occur and all populations in the county would remain at risk during future disaster events. There would be no disproportionately high or adverse impact on minority or low-income portions of the population—all populations would continue to be at risk.

Proposed Action Alternative – The Proposed Action Alternative would benefit all county populations by providing a safe, permanent location for the EOC. There would be no disproportionately high or adverse impact on minority or low-income portions of the population—all populations would benefit from the proposed project.

4.5 AIR QUALITY

The Clean Air Act (CAA) of 1970 requires that States adopt ambient air quality standards. The standards have been established in order to protect the public from potentially harmful amounts of pollutants. Under the CAA, the EPA establishes primary and secondary air quality standards. Primary air quality standards protect the public health, including the health of "sensitive populations, such as people with asthma, children, and older adults." Secondary air quality standards protect public welfare by promoting ecosystems health, and preventing decreased visibility and damage to crops and buildings. EPA has set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for the following six criteria pollutants: ozone (O3), particulate matter (PM2.5, PM10), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO2), and lead (Pb). According to MDEQ's 2007 Air Quality Data Report, Hancock County meets all NAAQS criteria (MDEQ 2007).

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to air quality.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, no long-term impacts to air quality would occur. Short-term impacts to air quality may occur during construction of the facility. To reduce temporary impacts to air quality, the construction contractors would be required to water down construction areas when dusty conditions exist. Residents may also be advised to close windows and doors when dusty conditions exist. Emissions from fuel-burning internal combustion engines (e.g., heavy equipment and earthmoving machinery) could temporarily increase the levels of some of the criteria pollutants, including CO, NO2, O3, PM10, and non-criteria pollutants such as volatile organic compounds. To reduce the emission of criteria pollutants, fuel-burning equipment running times would be kept to a minimum and engines would be properly maintained.

4.6 NOISE

Noise is generally defined as unwanted sound. Sound is most commonly measured in decibels (dB) on the A-weighted scale, which is the scale most similar to the range of sounds audible to the human ear. The Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) is an average measure of sound. The DNL descriptor is accepted by Federal agencies as a standard for estimating sound impacts and establishing guidelines for compatible land uses. EPA guidelines, and those of many other Federal agencies, state that outdoor sound levels in excess of 55 dB DNL are "normally unacceptable" for noise-sensitive land uses such as residences, schools, or hospitals. The proposed project site is located in a mainly residential/farmland area. There are few residential structures surrounding the project site.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to noise levels.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, temporary short-term increases in noise levels are anticipated during the construction period. To reduce noise levels during that period, construction activities would take place during normal business hours. The contractor selected for the project must comply with any Noise Control Ordinance in the Municipal Code for Hancock County. Construction activities may only be performed Monday through Saturday during normal business hours. Equipment and machinery installed at the proposed project site would meet all local, State, and Federal noise regulations.

4.7 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires Federal agencies to determine the effects of their proposed actions on threatened and endangered species of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats, and to take steps to conserve and protect these species.

The proposed project site consists of approximately 10 acres of unimproved and cleared land. Since the site had been cleared within the last 6 to 8 months, most of the vegetation is graminoids and other groundcover, and some large dense areas of greenbrier shrubs. A few loblolly pines and oaks remain around the perimeter of the property.

The USFWS lists the following federally endangered (E) and threatened (T) species for Hancock County, MS (USFWS 2008).

Table 2: Federally Endangered and Threatened Species – Hancock County

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
Louisiana black bear	*Ursus americanus luteolus*	T
West Indian manatee	*Trichechus manatus*	E
Piping plover	*Charadrius melodus*	T
Gopher tortoise	*Gopherus polyphemus*	T
Green turtle	*Chelonia mydas*	T
Kemp's Ridley	*Lepidochelys kempii*	E
Loggerhead turtle	*Caretta caretta*	T
Gulf sturgeon	*Acipenser oxyrhynchus desotoi*	T
Inflated heelsplitter	*Potamilus inflatus*	T
Louisiana quillwort	*Isoetes louisianensis*	E

A site visit conducted by URS biologists on May 19, 2010, confirmed that the proposed project site does not contain habitat for any federally listed flora and fauna species; therefore, it is unlikely that any threatened and endangered species are present.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no impacts to biological resources, including federally protected species.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, the approximately 10-acre site would be cleared and graded for the construction of the EOC. There is no suitable habitat for federally protected species on the site.

A consultation letter dated July 20, 2010, was submitted to the USFWS requesting agency review and comments regarding the proposed project (Appendix C). No response has been received to date.

4.8 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Section 106 of the NHPA, as amended, and implemented by 36 CFR Part 800, requires Federal agencies to consider the effects of their actions on historic properties and provide the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) an opportunity to comment on Federal projects prior to implementation. Historic properties are defined as archaeological sites, standing structures, or other historic resources listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

A FEMA Archaeologist and Architectural Historian, both qualified under the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (36 CFR Part 61) in their respective disciplines, conducted an assessment of the project's potential to affect historic properties within the area of potential effect (APE). The APE is the geographic area within which an undertaking may directly or indirectly cause changes in the character or use of historic properties, if such properties exist. For archaeological resources, the APE consists of the proposed linear construction corridors for

trenching activities associated with the EOC construction. The archaeological APE also includes the entire 10-acre project site. For aboveground historic properties, the APE is extended to a 0.5-mile radius around each of the project sites. This APE was previously established through FEMA consultation with the Mississippi SHPO.

Information gathered from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) online site database and survey files identified no archaeological surveys or previously recorded sites within the APE or within a 2-mile radius of the subject property.

A site visit was conducted by FEMA on March 3, 2010, and included ground inspection of the proposed project site. In addition, a windshield survey was conducted along both Highway 603 and County Road 416. The site visit revealed that the area for the proposed EOC contained very shallow layers of topsoil (layers most likely to contain cultural resources) with the hard and orange clay subsoil exposed in areas without grass. The lack of topsoil, along with the existence of major ground disturbance (agriculture and recent grubbing), would greatly reduce any potential for locating prehistoric as well as historic sites within this area. The surrounding areas have also been substantially disturbed due to residential development and farming. The roadside ditch along Highway 603 comprises a shallow ditch with a grass ground cover. The roadside is manmade and located on predominantly disturbed soils. FEMA has determined that a Phase I Archeological Investigation for the proposed site would not be necessary.

The proposed project area is located in a rural residential and farm setting. A site visit conducted by FEMA identified no structures on site, and that the majority of the structures within the APE are of modern construction, less than 50 years of age. The proposed site is not located within the boundaries of a National Register Historic District. The residential structures located with the APE date to circa 1980s and more recent construction and are not of sufficient age or architectural significance to warrant nomination to the NRHP. Commercial properties observed within the APE were of more recent construction, including county-owned baseball fields and a maintenance facility, and Coast Electrical Power offices with maintenance yard. FEMA has determined that no architecturally significant properties are present at the project location.

Therefore, for both archaeological and historic architectural resources, FEMA has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the Emergency Operations Center Construction Project.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and no historic properties would be affected.

Proposed Action Alternative – Based upon FEMA's findings, the proposed project is not anticipated to have any impact on historic properties. FEMA communicated these findings and its determination of No Historic Properties Affected in letters dated May 10, 2010, to the MDAH and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. In a response dated May 17, 2010, MDAH concurred that the project will have no effect to historic resources and stated that the agency has no objection with the proposed undertaking (Appendix C). No response has been received to date from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

In the event that archaeological deposits, including any Native American pottery, stone tools, or human remains are uncovered, the project would be halted. The applicant would stop all work

immediately in the vicinity of the discovery and take reasonable measures to avoid or minimize harm to the finds. All archaeological findings would be secured and access to the sensitive area restricted. The applicant would inform FEMA immediately and FEMA will consult with the SHPO or THPO and Tribes. Work in sensitive areas cannot resume until consultation is completed and appropriate measures have been taken to ensure that the project is in compliance with the NHPA.

4.9 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Hazardous substances are defined as any solid, liquid, contained gaseous or semisolid waste, or any combination of wastes that pose a substantial present or potential hazard to human health and the environment. Hazardous substances are primarily generated by industry, hospitals, research facilities, and the government. Improper management and disposal of hazardous substances can lead to pollution of groundwater or other drinking water supplies, and the contamination of surface water and soil. The primary Federal regulations for the management and disposal of hazardous substances are the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA).

Hancock County BOS contracted EMS to conduct a Phase I ESA of the 10-acre property proposed for construction of the EOC. According to the ESA, the subject property was not identified by any Federal, State, or local government databases in the Environmental Data Resources, Inc. (EDR) report. No other sites were listed in the database within the EDR search criteria surrounding the project site. There is no indication of hazardous materials at the subject property.

Although not considered recognized environmental conditions, the following potential issues were identified:

- Potential for abandoned water wells or septic systems associated with the former house. Should any be discovered, they would be handled according to applicable regulations.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no construction would occur and there would be no impacts to hazardous materials or waste.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, no hazardous materials or waste impacts are anticipated. Construction debris, as well as any potentially hazardous materials encountered during construction, should be properly handled and disposed of in accordance with applicable local, State, and Federal regulations.

A consultation letter, dated July 20, 2010, was submitted to the MDEQ requesting agency review and comments regarding the proposed project. In a response dated August 3, 2010, MDEQ indicated that there do not appear to be any sites impacting the subject project, but there are abandoned sites around the state that are may not be registered or accounted for (Appendix C).

4.10 SAFETY

Safety and security issues considered in this EA include the health and safety of the area residents and the public-at-large, and the protection of personnel involved in activities related to the proposed construction of the EOC.

EO 13045, Protection of Children, requires Federal agencies to make it a high priority to identify and assess environmental health and safety risks that may disproportionately affect children.

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no construction and potential direct impacts to safety of the population would not occur. If a major disaster, such as a hurricane or flooding event were to occur, residents of Hancock County, including children, would continue to be at risk.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, the construction of the EOC would provide protection for residents of Hancock County, including children, during both natural and man-made disaster events.

Construction activities could also present safety risks to those performing the activities. To minimize risks to safety and human health, all construction activities would be performed using qualified personnel trained in the proper use of the appropriate equipment, including all appropriate safety precautions. Additionally, all activities would be conducted in a safe manner in accordance with the standards specified in the OSHA regulations. The appropriate signage and barriers would be in place prior to construction activities to alert pedestrians and motorists of project activities. There would be no disproportionate health and safety risks to children.

4.11 SOCIOECONOMIC RESOURCES

The proposed project site is located in the north-central portion of Hancock County, and is bound by residential and farming areas to the north, south, east, and west. The total population of Hancock County, as measured by the 2000 census, was 42,969 with 56.7 percent of citizens over the age of 16 participating in the work force. Leading employment sectors are management, professional, and related occupations (27.9 percent); sales and office occupations (24.2 percent); service occupations (19.2 percent); and construction, extraction and maintenance occupations (15.3).

Leading industries include retail trade (11.9 percent); construction (11.5 percent); and manufacturing (9.5 percent).

No Action Alternative – Under the No Action Alternative, no impacts to socioeconomic resources would occur.

Proposed Action Alternative – Under the Proposed Action Alternative, impacts to socioeconomic resources would be minimal. No permanent employment positions would be created or lost; temporary jobs would be created during the construction of the EOC.

SECTION FIVE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

According to CEQ regulations, cumulative impacts represent the "impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time (40 CFR 1508.7)." In accordance with NEPA and to the extent reasonable and practical, this EA considered the combined effect of the Proposed Action Alternative and other actions occurring or proposed in the vicinity of the proposed project site.

The proposed project site is within the City of Kiln in the north central part of Hancock County, MS. The area in the project vicinity is mainly rural residential and farm land. Hancock County and the entire Mississippi Gulf Coast are still in the process of recovering from the extensive damages caused by Hurricane Katrina. The recovery efforts in Hancock County include demolition, reconstruction, and new construction. These projects and the proposed project may have a cumulative temporary impact on air quality in Hancock County by increasing criteria pollutants during construction activities.

If additional construction projects are active within the vicinity of the EOC, these projects and the Proposed Action may have cumulative temporary impacts on air quality by increasing criteria pollutants during construction activities and traffic. No other cumulative impacts are anticipated. Because the land in the project area has been used as residential and is now cleared, no cumulative impacts to biological or cultural resources are anticipated.

SECTION SIX PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

FEMA is the lead Federal agency for conducting the NEPA compliance process for the Hancock County BOS EOC in the Kiln Community of Hancock County, MS. It is the goal of the lead agency to expedite the preparation and review of NEPA documents and to be responsive to the needs of the community and the purpose and need of the proposed action while meeting the intent of NEPA and complying with all NEPA provisions.

The Hancock County BOS will notify the public of the availability of the draft EA through publication of a public notice in the major local daily published newspaper. The public notice will be published in the *Sun Herald* on September 12 and September 19, 2010. FEMA will conduct a 14-day public comment period commencing on the initial publication date of the public notice and ending on September 25, 2010.

SECTION SEVEN AGENCY COORDINATION AND PERMITS

The following agencies and organizations were contacted by letter requesting project review during the preparation of this EA. The responses received to date are included in Appendix C.

- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 4 Office, Water Management Division
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Jackson, Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District
- Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Office of Pollution Control, Environmental Permits Division
- Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
- Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Historic Preservation Division
- Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Tribal Historic Preservation Office
- Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Wetlands Permitting Section
- Mississippi Department of Transportation, Environmental Division
- Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission

In accordance with applicable local, State, and Federal regulations, the applicant would be responsible for acquiring any necessary permits prior to commencing construction at the proposed project site.

SECTION EIGHT CONCLUSIONS

No impacts to geology, groundwater, wetlands, environmental justice, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, hazardous materials, or socioeconomic resources are anticipated with the Proposed Action Alternative. Positive impacts to public health and safety are expected. Long-term, minor impacts include clearing of land and excavating soils at the construction site. During the construction period, short-term impacts to soils, downstream surface water, transportation, air quality, and noise are anticipated. All short-term impacts require measures to minimize and mitigate the effect on the proposed project site and surrounding areas.

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