FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW OFFICE BUILDING, CHILD-CARE FACILITY, PARKING GARAGE, AND STORM-WATER RETENTION POND

AGENCY: U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

SUMMARY: The DOE has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), DOE/EA-1444, to analyze the potential environmental consequences of a major facilities construction effort at the Morgantown, West Virginia, campus of the National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL). Within the existing NETL site, the DOE would construct a new 3-story office building with 48,000 ft^2 of usable office space, sufficient to accommodate approximately 135 employees. Existing parking space lost to the proposed new office building would be replaced by construction of a 3-level parking garage plus the addition of one or more new paved parking areas. Several old trailer buildings on the existing NETL site would be retired and removed from the site. The DOE would also purchase five (5) acres of land adjoining the existing NETL site and would construct upon this land a new 9,200 ft^2, 1.5- to 2-story building to provide child-care for a maximum of 142 children. Two residential dwellings on the acquired property would be removed to accommodate the new child-care facility. Within the low-lying part of this land, the DOE would construct a stormwater retention pond. Additionally, the NETL is considering the possibility of moving its employee credit union to the 5-acre parcel.

Based on the analysis in the EA, the DOE has determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, 42 United States Code 4321 *et seq.* Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and DOE is issuing this FONSI.

COPIES OF THE EA ARE AVAILABLE FROM:

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BACKGROUND: As part of its mission, the DOE's National Energy Technology Laboratory (NETL) provides science, technology, and policy options to resolve environmental, supply, and reliability issues associated with the use of fossil energy. Consistent with this mission and in partnership with stakeholders, the NETL supports efforts by industry to increase energy efficiency, minimize wastes, reduce environmental impacts, and increase the availability of domestic energy supplies through productivity and operational enhancements.

Primarily, the new permanent office space will replace existing substandard office space. Currently, seven old trailer buildings house approximately 108 site-support contractor employees, including many scientists and engineers. These buildings have served their useful life span and present increasing safety and maintenance concerns. In addition to these larger trailer buildings, which provide office space, several small trailer buildings serve various functions. The NETL desires to retire most of the remaining trailer buildings from service and remove them from the site. New office space will be needed for the displaced employees.

Likewise, the proposed new child-care facility would replace the existing child-care facility. Currently, the children are housed in an old trailer building, which suffers from the same maintenance concerns as the other trailer buildings. The NETL proposes to retire this trailer building from service and remove it from the site. The present location of the child-care facility would be converted into much needed visitor parking near NETL's main conference center.

Each trailer building consists of one to eight trailers joined together with a metal skirt around the base. These trailer buildings were installed during a period of growth during the 1970s and were intended to temporarily solve a shortage of office space until permanent office buildings could be built. Aging mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems inside these trailers require constant maintenance, and these trailer buildings perform far below current energy efficiency standards because of minimal insulation in the walls, roofs, floors, and windows. The trailer buildings are reaching the end of their cost-effective and reasonable life.

To provide further increases in physical security for the laboratory complex and to increase the safety of people utilizing the child-care facility and the credit union, the NETL proposes to move the child-care and credit union facilities to lower risk areas, separate from the main employee access areas and parking areas. However, the nearby proximity of the proposed locations would provide the current level of convenience to employees who use these facilities.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION: The DOE proposes to eliminate several existing trailer buildings at the Morgantown campus of the NETL and to replace them through the construction of new facilities. First, the DOE proposes to construct a new 3-story office building with 48,000 ft^2 of net useable floor space, which could accommodate approximately 135 employees. The building would be located within the existing main employee parking lot, near Collins Ferry Road. In addition to housing administrative areas, the building would accommodate laboratory visitors, provide general office space for the Computational Energy Sciences focus area, and showcase the NETL's work products and environmental awareness. To replace the lost parking space, a parking garage would be built behind (east of) the proposed new building. The parking

garage would have three levels and would occupy part of a valley on the north and eastern side of the existing North Parking Lot.

Second, the DOE proposes to purchase 5 acres of land adjoining the northwestern border of the developed site and to construct a child-care facility on this land, outside the main security fence for the laboratory. The land may also provide space for a storm water retention pond with potential geothermal heating, ventilation, and air conditioning applications for the new buildings. The child-care facility would consist of a 1.5 story or a 2-story 9,200 ft^2 building, an adjoining 10,000 ft^2 playground, and a 16,000 ft^2 parking area and driveway for drop-off and pick-up of children. The entrance to the parking area would connect directly with Collins Ferry Road, separate from the NETL laboratory facility. The new facility would potentially accommodate 142 children, ages 6 weeks to 12 years (including the "After-School Program"). The entire facility, bounded by a security fence, would occupy 37,000 ft^2. The employee credit union may be moved into a part of the child-care building or located elsewhere on the 5-acre parcel. The current child-care facility would be replaced with 5000 ft^2 to 9000 ft^2 of additional parking space.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES: The Environmental Assessment identified that the most notable changes to result from the proposed actions would occur in the following areas: aesthetics and land use, wetlands, wildlife habitat, vehicular traffic, cumulative effects, and construction-related impacts resulting from traffic, equipment emissions, fugitive dust, noise, and surface water runoff. No significant adverse impacts or environmental concerns were identified from analyzing the planned construction and operation of the proposed facilities.

Aesthetics and Land Use: Residential land and some cropland/pasture land on the proposed 5-acre parcel would be converted into commercial use as a child-care facility. A small section of stream valley, 200 to 300 feet in length, would be converted into a pond. There would be no impacts on parks, recreation areas, contiguous residential neighborhoods, or scenic viewsheds.

Wetlands: Five palustrine emergent wetlands have been identified and delineated within the zone of possible direct construction impacts. In lay terms, four of the five wetlands would be described as seeps, and one would be described as a stream fill upstream of an obstruction to stream flow. These 5 wetlands comprise 0.08 acres. All wetlands received a high rating for groundwater discharge. Three wetlands received a high rating for promoting wildlife diversity and abundance. One wetland received a high rating for toxicant retention. The proposed storm-water retention pond may provide an opportunity to compensate for the loss of natural wetlands, so wetlands creation would be considered during the design stage. Additionally, the NETL would consider other wetland construction and enhancement projects located further downstream as additional compensation for the loss of the five natural wetlands. The NETL would follow the permitting requirements of the State of West Virginia and the appropriate Federal regulatory agencies.

Wildlife Habitat: The 5-acre parcel proposed for purchase would contain the entire wildlife habitat that would be affected. Approximately one-third of the 5 acres is covered by deciduous forest. Several large trees (American beech, yellow poplar and oak) exist along a steep-sided gully within the forest area. At least some of these trees would be removed when the central section of the 1.5-acre forest would be cleared for the proposed storm-water retention pond. Most

of the forest area would remain intact. Another one-third of the 5-acre parcel contains an abandoned field that now harbors shrubs, young trees, and grasses. At least part, if not all, of this meadow area would be converted into a playground, lawn, or other use to serve the proposed child-care facility. The remaining portion of the 5-acre parcel presently contains 2 houses (1 is abandoned), a garage, and lawns. Nesting and foraging habitat for birds and rodents on the 5-acre parcel would be disturbed and partially eliminated. Larger mammals, such as deer, could be displaced and would suffer from noise and vibration during the construction period. There are no threatened or endangered species or their critical habitats within the vicinity of the proposed activities. Other activities on the existing NETL site would not disturb wildlife habitat.

Vehicular Traffic: The local roads and streets near the proposed projects would experience an increase in traffic during construction. This increase would be of short duration, occurring when construction workers, material deliveries, and equipment arrive and depart from the site. Construction activities would not obstruct Collins Ferry Road, other than to make connections to utilities. Upon completion of the construction work, traffic loads would return to the current state.

Secondary Development & Cumulative Effects: Recently, the Collins Ferry Road corridor has experienced a spurt of commercial growth. The proposed projects would add to that growth and may encourage other commercial developments. However, it is likely that future commercial developments would occur in this area regardless of the NETL's activities. In the context of Morgantown or Monongalia County, the secondary impacts would be negligible. Furthermore, these projects would not significantly add to cumulative impacts, either in terms of the DOE's impacts on the environment within the United States or in terms of the NETL's effects on the local environment. In fact, one of the prime goals of these projects is to reduce the NETL's energy (electricity and/or natural gas) consumption for heating, air conditioning, and lighting.

Construction-Related Impacts: Construction of the proposed projects would have both negative and positive impacts. The negative impacts would be typical construction noise, dust, and traffic. The positive impacts would be construction jobs and local sales of construction materials and support services. These temporary conditions would end when the construction ceases. Air quality would be temporarily impacted by equipment engine emissions, by dust from excavation work and construction activities, and by smoke from burning cleared vegetation. Noise and vibrations would arise from earth-moving work, pile driving, heavy equipment movement, and various construction activities. Operable mufflers would be required on all heavy equipment engines. To minimize burning, preference would be given to selling, chipping, or shredding wood and allowing natural decay of other woody materials.

Surface Water Runoff: Erosion of soil and increased surface water runoff would be controlled according to an Erosion & Sedimentation Control Plan and a Storm-Water Control Plan. As appropriate, runoff, erosion, and sedimentation would be controlled with seeding, mulching, silt-fencing, and sedimentation ponds. A storm-water discharge permit would be required. Unpaved work roads would be gravel armored. The length of time that unprotected soil would be exposed would be limited according to terms specified in the construction contracts.

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ALTERNATIVE CONSIDERED: In addition to the proposed action, the DOE has considered the No-Action Alternative, whereby the NETL would continue to use trailer buildings and leased office space. Continued usage of the trailers would require that the DOE extensively renovate the trailers, achieving only part of the NETL's goals. Currently underutilized buildings on site are being renovated for future usage. The DOE reviewed the possibilities for additional leasing of off-site office space or the purchase of existing off-site office space. The DOE did not find suitable off-site office space available for purchase. Primarily for reasons of work efficiency and long-term cost control, the DOE prefers to build on-site rather than to lease off-site office space. Off-site options for the child-care facility were not extensively considered because employee convenience is the essence of this employee benefit.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY: The Draft EA was presented during a Community Interest Group meeting and was made available to the public for review and comment. The Draft EA was also posted on the NETL website. Copies were made available for review at the Morgantown Public Library in Morgantown, West Virginia, and at the Morgantown campus of the NETL. Public Notices announcing availability of the Draft EA were published in ***The Dominion Post***, which is the principal newspaper serving Morgantown, West Virginia. The only comments and responses to the Draft EA were provided by attendees at a Community Interest Group meeting. The primary concern over adverse impacts was the short-term increase in construction-related traffic. These concerns were discussed, and the NETL's plans to minimize traffic impacts were clearly presented during the meeting. No adverse comments objecting to the proposed action or the environmental analysis were received.

DETERMINATION: Based on the information and analyses in the EA, the DOE has determined that the proposed Federal action, to purchase 5 acres of land and to construct several new facilities, does not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and the DOE is issuing this FONSI.

Issued in Morgantown, West Virginia, this 16 day of September 2002.

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Director
National Energy Technology Laboratory