



Environmental Assessment Scoping Summary
Newtok Relocation Project – Pioneering Phase
Newtok Village Council

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FEMA

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FEMA Region X
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Introduction

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a pending Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding request from the Newtok Village Council (NVC) through the Alaska Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHA&EM), which administers HMGP for FEMA. The NVC has applied for funds to relocate 12 residential structures from Newtok to Mertarvik, consistent with its *Strategic Management Plan - Newtok to Mertarvik* (Plan) and specifically the ‘Pioneering Phase’ therein. Additionally, the NVC has Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Tribal Transportation Program funds available to build some roads in Mertarvik which would also support the pioneering elements. The NVC also anticipates funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Office of Native American Programs Imminent Threat Grant Program that would support additional critical infrastructure for occupancy of the 12 homes once relocated to Mertarvik. The proposed or pending federal actions require review per the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and related environmental and historic preservation statutes and executive orders; as implemented by each respective agency’s NEPA implementing regulations.

This report includes a summary of formal scoping activities completed for the proposed Newtok Relocation Project per NEPA and consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) NEPA regulations, 40 Code of Federal Regulations Part 1501.7, *Scoping*. The purpose of ‘scoping’ is to inform the scope, focus, and content of an Environmental Assessment (EA). FEMA’s NEPA scoping informally started in October 2015, after the project was determined programmatically eligible for funding; and included gathering available information about Newtok and Mertarvik, including prior federal environmental review and initiation of coordination with federal and state resource agencies and stakeholders.

The proposed action, for NEPA purposes, includes elements of the NVC’s Plan pioneering phase. This includes FEMA-funded relocation of 12 homes from Newtok to Mertarvik and BIA-funded road construction in Mertarvik. HUD funds may be available to provide needed interim utilities to support occupancy of the homes once in Mertarvik. Furthermore, there may be other ‘connected actions’ funded or planned by non-federal entities that will require outlining in the EA. Early coordination was done with BIA to collaborate on an EA that would satisfy both agency’s NEPA requirements, as well as with HUD in anticipation of their funding; with detailed discussion deferred to the outcome scoping and pending other NVC funding actions.

Much of the planning and details associated with this formal scoping effort were FEMA-coordinated because its proposed action, relocating 12 homes, has the most significant public interest and need for feedback. Additionally, during a FEMA site visit to Newtok on November 12, 2015 the NVC requested FEMA participate in a public meeting to explain the EA process to its residents, in the interest of transparency and community decision-making. The scoping effort was fully coordinated in advance with the NVC, DHS&EM), Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED), and BIA.

Public and Agency Scoping Notices

The notification of scoping efforts and the public comment period, March 25 to April 25, 2016 was done through published ads, web-posting, emails, and mailings as follows:

- Information about scoping was posted on DCCED's Newtok webpage on March 23, 2016: <https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/dcra/PlanningLandManagement/NewtokPlanningGroup.aspx> this included a Notice of Intent to Prepare an EA, scoping information, and comment sheet
- The Notice of Intent to Prepare EA was published in the March 23, 2016 issue of *The Delta Discovery* and in the March 24, 2016 issue of *The Tundra Drums*, which included the public meeting information and link to DCCED website for additional information
- Emails were sent on March 24, 2016 to 78 individuals making up a broad contact list for federal/state/regional/Tribal entities mostly associated with Newtok Planning Group, attached were the Notice of Intent, scoping information, and comment sheet, and an invitation to attend the April 11, 2016 agency meeting (contact list available on request)
- Direct mail was sent on March 24, 2016 to 40 individuals making up a select list (subset of emails) of federal/State/regional entity leadership, including the Notice of Intent, scoping information, and comment sheet (mailing list available on request)

Scoping Meetings

Two meetings were scheduled to provide information about the proposed project and invite comments, as follows.

Newtok Public Meeting:

- Held on April 5, 2016 from 7 to 9pm at the Newtok School gymnasium
- Meeting was well attended with 36 folks signing in and several others joining after meeting started. Participants included several homeowners of the 12 homes proposed to be relocated, NVC members, Newtok Corporation members, and Newtok residents
- Scoping information was made available as well as comment sheets, and posters were affixed on walls that had information about the proposed project including conceptual plans or community layout of Mertarvik
- Meeting format included a power point guided presentation (available upon request) to briefly explain the grant processes, the NEPA process and specifically scoping, the proposed project, and what feedback was sought
- After introductions by the NVC and Sally Cox, DCCED; presentations were done by Science Kilner, FEMA; Brent Nichols, DHS&EM; Andrea Meeks, CRW; and Romy Cadiente, Newtok Relocation Coordinator
- The Newtok School principal, Grant Kaskatok, translated the presentation in Yup'ik Eskimo
- Notes of the meeting were taken by Ramona VanCleve, FEMA, and others
- Chris Allard, Denali Commission, and Don Antrobus, ANTHC also attended
- Several participants asked questions and provided comments consistent with the intent of scoping, summary below

Anchorage Agency Meeting:

- Held on April 11, 2016 from 1 to 2pm at DCCED office, 550 W 7th Ave, Anchorage, a conference line was made available for folks to call in
- Meeting was well attended with 22 folks present in person and signed in (available on request), and several others joining the conference line
- Participants included NVC members and their attorney, Senator Murkowski’s Office, Denali Commission, DCCED, AK DCRA, DHS&EM, Governor’s Office, HUD, BIA, ANTHC, VSW, CEQ, CCHRC, TCC, AVCP
- Scoping information was made available as well as comment sheets
- Meeting format included a power point guided presentation, same as provided at public meeting (described above), after an introduction by Sally Cox, DCCED, the presentation was made by Science Kilner and Brent Nichols and Julie Stoneking, BIA, provided information on roads
- Notes of the meeting were taken
- Several participants asked questions and provided comments consistent with the intent of scoping, summary below

Summary of Comments

Written or verbal comments were provided by state agencies, one business, and individuals or households. The comments mainly expressed concerns about alternative details and community/social/public service plans at Mertarvik. When questions were asked about the process or project and answers were known by those presenting, they were provided to participants. The below table summarizes the scoping comments received and they are listed in no particular order.

Commenter	Method	Comment Summary
USACE AK District, Environmental Section	voice mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some prior environmental reviews completed for Mertarvik• planned EA should be comprehensive
USDA, Rural Development, Palmer AK	email	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supportive of project and combined EA effort• USDA can provide loans to NVC for future development in Mertarvik for full range of housing and infrastructure needs
AK Dept. of Environmental Conservation, Solid Waste Program	email	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommendations provided for Mertarvik landfill facility• Newtok currently has no permitted landfill facility so no waste may be disposed of there
Gazewood & Weiner Attorneys at Law	letter via email	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• FEMA should limit the scope of its EA to its funded action, and not include BIA TTP funded roadwork in Mertarvik, which will have separate environmental review, information provided about BIA NEPA reviews

Commenter	Method	Comment Summary
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation efforts should be coordinated with past, ongoing and future environmental reviews by other agencies, referred to 2008 USACE EA completed for Mertarvik Evacuation Center • Concern over disruptions, extent and timing of environmental review relative to proposed summer 2016 work in Mertarvik • Is a EA level of review appropriate for relocations, referred to FEMA’s NEPA regulations for Categorical Exclusions • Alternatives may not be relevant • Encouraged buyout as the preferred option
Individual or Household		
<i>Purpose and Need</i>	verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is timing or schedule for relocations, 2016 or 2017, need to move is urgent • Ninglick River erosion severe, a lot concern over 4 structures closest to bank • Flooding along Newtok River (slough) and lake has been getting worse • Continued ground settling, land subsidence, is worsening flooding and erosion risks
<i>Proposed Action</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground is very soft, there will need to be enough gravel to move and set up homes so they are stable • Will homes be able to be loaded onto a barge • Can homes be moved in the winter, over ice road • If relocation sites aren’t good will funding be lost • What are plans for more homes in Mertarvik • Concerns over damage to the homes during the move and whether repairs would be made • Could the homes be dismantled and reassembled
<i>Alternatives</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a flood control/erosion wall or levee won’t work • Many questions about buy-out alternative and how this would work and impact relocations and substitutions • If buyout, demolition debris could be burned on-site instead of transporting to landfill (expensive barging and disposal costs) • If buyout, building materials could also be salvaged and reused since building materials are costly to ship in and scarce

Commenter	Method	Comment Summary
<i>Environmental/Natural/Cultural Resources</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts to fish need considered, salmon and seals • Ground is very soft, wetlands, will need to be enough gravel to move and set up homes
<i>Social/Community/Public Services</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are plans for health care or a medical facility/clinic in Mertarvik for pioneer residents • What are plans for transportation in and out of Mertarvik, by air or boat, to support pioneer residents • What are plans for education, will a school be built to support relocated families with children

Scoping Conclusions

The comments received during this scoping effort will be helpful to finalize the scope of the proposed action for an EA. They also help focus continued coordination and collaboration with federal funding agencies and stakeholders that have connected actions and concurrent NEPA requirements. Implementation details of the proposed action and the buyout alternative will need to be further explored/evaluated for presentation in a draft EA, and to the NVC to support decision-making. Additionally, given the urgency to take action and anticipated extent of time to further develop supporting infrastructure in Mertarvik, interim mitigation measures will need to be explored at least for the structures most at risk to riverine erosion. Given the interest over community, social, or public services and facilities in Mertarvik, the draft EA will need to articulate the NVC’s plans to address these critical elements that will be needed to support permanent occupancy of relocated ‘pioneer’ residents in Mertarvik.

Next Steps

The following includes tasks and coordination needed to draft the EA.

- Scope of EA federal action, including connected actions, needs finalizing with NVC, BIA and HUD; and other stakeholder as necessary
- Details on roles (lead/cooperating federal agency), responsibilities, EA tasks, documentation, and EA schedule need to be defined initially amongst FEMA, BIA and HUD, and then coordinated with the NVC and others
- Information gaps need to be addressed to draft a meaningful EA, make findings of effect, determine mitigation measures, and further NEPA decision-making, including further public involvement; these includes provision of:
 - Finalized Mertarvik community survey/layout, housing master plan (at least for relocated homes and those that may be built with HUD loans)
 - Preliminary infrastructure design and engineering plans for the pioneering phase (community and quarry roads, utility retrofits for potable water, wastewater management, solid waste management, power and bulk fuel storage)

- Essential community/public/social service plans, including facilities, are needed for Mertarvik that detail how pioneers residents will be supported (education, health care, emergencies, transportation by air or boat, communication, supplies)
- Draft EA and complete necessary additional resource studies and agency consultations
- Complete public involvement to present and make available draft EA findings
- Finalize EA and agencies issue decision documents
- Federal funds released for use and implementation