March 24, 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

From: Joe Barger
NEPA Coordinator
National Institute of Standards and Technology

Subject: **Finding of No Significant Impact**

Project: Renovation and Expansion of the Seacoast Science Center
Location: Odiorne Point State Park, New Hampshire

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and associated implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) require that all major federal actions be reviewed with respect to their environmental consequences. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is providing a congressionally directed funding grant for the Renovation and Expansion of the Seacoast Science Center located in Odiorne Point State Park, New Hampshire. Consequently, NEPA and the associated implementing regulations apply to this project. An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by the grant recipient for this project, the Seacoast Science Center, and provided for public review. The EA (Environmental Assessment: Seacoast Science Center, January 21, 2026, ARQ Architects) is incorporated by reference. This memorandum summarizes the impacts identified and the mitigation proposed in the EA and documents a finding of no significant environmental impact (FONSI) for the Renovation and Expansion of the Seacoast Science Center.

Background

Over its 33-year history in Odiorne Point State Park, the Seacoast Science Center (SSC) has provided environmental and marine science education to students and the visiting public. The SSC also serves as a visitor center for Odiorne Point State Park, and is a federally authorized marine mammal response entity for New Hampshire and northern Massachusetts. The SSC marine mammal rescue team has responded to over 1,300 animals.

SSC educational programming includes:

- Educational programs and environmental day camps for children, age 1 to 12th grade.

- A diverse collection of high quality, standards-aligned STEM school programs offered as destination field trips, in-school outreach programs and off site after-school activities.
- Family learning experiences with daily public programs, special after-hours family oriented educational programming, and both domestic and international eco-adventure travel.
- Distance learning programs delivered to remote audiences, literally around the world, from SSC's Gregg Interactive Learning Studio.
- Community events that have become part of the cultural fabric of seacoast New Hampshire.

The SSC offers over 30 live animal and interactive exhibits that introduce regionally relevant natural science and cultural history topics. The permanent exhibits include eighteen aquariums, installations representing habitats from tide pools to the deep-water environments of the Gulf of Maine, and the largest collection of marine mammal skeletons on display in northern New England.

Need for the Project

The SSC facility is now over 30 years old, having undergone only minor renovations and improvements to the facility and its infrastructure. The SSC has hosted several million visitors and program participants since opening its doors in 1992, resulting in a public facility that has become incrementally worn and out of date. Though it has served the museum well during the past three decades, the existing building no longer meets the current or anticipated future needs of its staff, visitors, and rescued sea mammals. Changes in the climate have also meant that the current facility is at ongoing risk from sea level rise and storm surges.

Description of the Action

The Proposed Action includes the construction of a new building for the SSC in Odiorne Point State Park as well as retaining and renovating a portion of the existing museum building (the Sugden House.) The total area of the existing building is 15,435 square feet (sf). The new and renovated building space will total 26,105 sf. The project area of disturbance is 4.4 acres total, including portions of the site required for upgrades to the existing utility infrastructure.

The existing Sugden House (a summer cottage constructed in 1920), which forms a portion of the current museum building, will be retained and limited cosmetic renovation will be done within the structure. The stone walls, concrete floor, and existing 1920 windows/doors are to be retained at the Sugden House. Restrooms (not original to the Sugden House) will be retained.

The portion of the existing museum building constructed in 1992 (approximately 10,551 sf total) that is currently connected to Sugden House will be demolished. A new two-story structure separate from Sugden House will be constructed, de-coupling the new building from the historic stone walled cottage. This new museum building will be elevated above the current ground plane to provide additional resilience to rising seas and storm surge. It will be built with a slab-on-grade foundation system. Limited excavation will be required due to the proximity to ledge

(surface and underground bedrock) throughout the project area. The site area impacted is 100% previously disturbed and currently consists of gravel, pavement, walkways, lawn and building footprint.

Impacts and Mitigation

The EA for this project identifies the environmental impacts of the proposed action, as well as measures to mitigate impacts. This FONSI is predicated on the implementation of the mitigation identified in the EA and summarized below:

Land Use/Stormwater
Approximately 6,194 sf area will be excavated to accommodate footing and foundation walls for this project. The entire limit of disturbance, including utility upgrades, is over 4 acres.

Potential stormwater impacts from construction activity will be mitigated and contained by following construction activity best managements practices (BMPs) for storm water and environmental protection as described in the *New Hampshire Stormwater Manual Volume 3: Erosion and Sedimentation Controls During Construction*.

SSC and the construction team, with guidance from the civil engineer, will develop and follow a Soil Erosion and Sediment Control (SESC) Plan approved by State of New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES). Controls implemented will meet State requirements contained in Env-Wq 1500 Part 1506.

The project will reduce impermeable surfaces and employ on-site storm water management practices for capturing and infiltrating runoff, including the use of vegetated swales, detention basins and other site design measures to conform current regulatory requirements under State of New Hampshire Administrative Code, Department of Environmental Services, Water Quality and Quantity Programs (Env-Wq) 1500 with practices described in the *New Hampshire Stormwater Manual Volume 2: Post-Construction Best Management Practices Selection & Design.*

The area of proposed demolition and new construction extends into a Protected Shoreland (a zone 250 feet inland from the Highest Observable Tide (HOT)). Per the requirements of the NHDES Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act, the project has obtained a Shoreland Permit. The project has also obtained NHDES Alteration of Terrain (AOT) Permit since the area of disturbance exceeds the 5000 square foot threshold.

New site work will include landscape strategies to mitigate sea level rise and damage from storm surge as well as support storm water infiltration and health of local ecosystems. Native coastal

perennial planting areas along the shore land edge will help impede overland wave movement and retain soils along the edge of the rocky coastline. Elevated planters with native coastal shrubs and perennials will provide a vegetative buffer zone along the perimeter of the museum terrace and the Sugden foundation edge. Permeable hardscape materials will be used for the museum terrace and many of the pedestrian pathways to reduce runoff and encourage on-site storm water infiltration. Stormwater management designs incorporate pre-treatment structures, bioretention areas and sediment forebays to manage runoff from paved roadways and parking. Landscape planting throughout the site will reintroduce native habitat species to support the local coastal ecosystem.

Wastewater

The SSC currently manages wastewater using an on-site septic system with associated leach fields. Analysis by civil engineers indicates that the overall load to the system from the new museum building will be like or less than the current sewer load from the existing building. The leach field was originally constructed per NHDES approved plans and an "Operational Approval" certificate was obtained from the State of New Hampshire. Engineers evaluated the existing leach field capacity and confirmed that it can accommodate the anticipated sewer loads for the new building. Test pits were excavated to confirm that the leach field would not be impacted by the current seasonal high groundwater table.

An onsite evaluation of the sewage disposal system and infrastructure was conducted on August 12, 2024, by CSA Environmental Consultants LLC and witnessed by Dennis Plante, Town of Rye. The evaluation recommended identifying the location of D-boxes (leach field distribution boxes), replacing them as needed, and installing inspection covers on the D-boxes. Execution of the same will be addressed during the project construction. Should there be any unanticipated findings during the disturbance of the construction area or the septic area, notifications to applicable parties will be made.

The existing sewage pump station will be replaced as part of this project.

Flood Risk

The engineering and design team employed a Climate Informed Science Approach to establish both the flood elevation and corresponding flood hazard area for this project using the best available data and methods integrating current and future flooding scenarios. The engineering team concluded that the project should be designed to consider 3.9 feet of sea level rise. The boundary of that projected flood zone coincided approximately with elevation 17' on the site. The design team added an additional 2 feet of elevation, as a risk mitigation measure, to settle on a proposed ground floor elevation of 19'.

The new building will be sited ± 50' inland from the Sugden House. An elevated terrace with permeable pavers will provide an additional buffer against coastal storm surge and wave action. Primary electrical systems and mechanical systems will be located at higher elevations or on upper floors and roofs to protect the equipment from storm surges and flooding.

Endangered Species

Construction activities will be confined to a previously developed area of the site. Landscape and site work will restore native habitats on previously disturbed areas of the site.

The Monarch Butterfly is a proposed threatened species and review of impact to the butterfly is voluntary. The proposed project has identified measures for improving habitat for the Monarch Butterfly including adding diverse nectar and pollinator species in the planting plans and including exhibits for citizen science within the science museum.

Two endangered bat species as well as other bats of concern are found adjacent to the project work area within an existing World War II bunker. Project exterior construction will be limited to April 15th through October 31st. This time restriction avoids disturbance to the bat hibernation period. The time restriction has been incorporated into the DES permit plans. Minimum Conservation Measures have been identified to avoid activities that may affect the hibernating bats.

Air Quality

Temporary adverse air quality impacts will result from the operation of construction equipment during the construction of the new facility. Air quality impacts include emissions from construction vehicles and machinery as well as air-born dust (fine particulates) caused by excavation and exposed soils. Mitigation measures will include best practices for dust and emission control as required by the State of New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) regulations under State of New Hampshire Administrative Code, Department of Environmental Services, Water Quality and Quantity Programs (Env-Wq) 1500 Part 1506, as well as applicable requirements of United States Green Building Council (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) version 4 sections under Sustainable Sites (SS) and Indoor Environmental Quality (EQ) headings.

Post-construction, the proposed project will have a net positive impact on air quality. The new facility will replace fossil-fuel-based heating systems with an all-electric system of high-efficiency, air-sourced heat pumps. Enhanced building envelope and fenestration performance, coupled with passive strategies like solar-shading and use of natural ventilation, will reduce the overall energy requirements for space conditioning. Electrical energy for the building systems will come from on-site renewables (existing and new photovoltaic roof panels) supplemented by grid-sourced electricity.

The proposed project has incorporated the design criteria to pursue LEED v4 certification through the Building Design + Construction (BD+C) rating system with LEED Zero Carbon certification through the USGBC or the International Living Futures Institute (ILFI) Zero Carbon (ZC) certification.

Noise

This project will generate temporary noise during construction from heavy machinery, such as bulldozers, graders, excavators, dump trucks, and cement trucks, as well as smaller tools, such as jackhammers and nail guns. Noise and sound levels would be typical of new construction activities and be intermittent and temporary. To limit the noise impacts during construction, construction activities would be limited to daytime hours, 7am to 5pm, Monday through Saturday.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The project design retains the existing Sugden House while demolishing the connected museum building constructed in 1992. As a result of the work, Sugden House will no longer be physically connected to the museum and will be restored closer to its original appearance as a free-standing coastal cottage.

Based on an updated project area form, the Division of Historical Resources from the State of New Hampshire Department of Natural & Cultural Resources made the determination that the proposed building project may alter the historic character of the district. They requested completion of an interpretive plan and archaeological study as appropriate mitigation measures. The archaeological study was completed by Heritage Consultants in August 2024. Representatives of the State of New Hampshire, NIST and the SSC entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the interpretive plan to satisfy the remaining mitigation measures needed for acceptance of the proposed project. The requirements of this MOA and interpretive plan will be implemented.

Permitting

The Seacoast Science Center is committed to meeting all conditions and mitigation measures specified in the permits and agreements completed for this project, including:

- NHDES Shoreland Impact Permit, 2024 03513, EA Appendix E
- NHDES Wetland Permit, 2024 03514, EA Appendix E
- NHDES Alteration of Terrain Permit, AoT-2786, EA Appendix E
- CSA Environmental Consultants, Septic Leach Field recommendations, 8/12/24, EA Appendix H
- MOA between NHSHPO and NIST, 10/28/24, EA Appendix L

- U.S. DOI Fish and Wildlife Service Conservation Measures, Project Code 2025-033432, 6/30/25, EA Appendix M
- NH Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources, 10/31/25 letter, EA Appendix N

Conclusion

NIST hereby adopts the EA prepared by the applicant for the proposed action described above. After reviewing the assessment and the supporting materials provided by the grant recipient, NIST finds that the EA properly documents the project's environmental impact.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500 through 1508), NIST has determined that, with the mitigation measures described above and in the EA, the proposed action will have no significant adverse impact on the quality of the human environment. As a result of this FONSI, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

Approvals:

JOSEPH BARGER Digitally signed by JOSEPH BARGER Date: 2026.04.02 08:25:54 -04'00'

Joe Barger
NIST NEPA Coordinator

4/2/2026
Date

ANDREW WRIGHT Digitally signed by ANDREW WRIGHT Date: 2026.04.02 11:52:50 -04'00'

Andrew Wright
NIST Chief Facilities Management Office

Date