

Commenter F1: Form letter	
<p><i>55 copies of the following form letter were received:</i></p> <p>Subject: Save Battle Mountain Sanitarium</p> <p>Dear VA Black Hills Health Care System,</p> <p>I am writing to provide comments on the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) draft Environmental Impact Statement and the agency's preference to abandon the Battle Mountain Sanitarium in Hot Springs, South Dakota.</p> <p>First and foremost, I urge the agency to reject its plan to close the medical center. This facility received the 2013 Joint Commission Gold Seal of Approval and was named one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places (R) and a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.</p> <p>Closing Battle Mountain Sanitarium would break with the campus' proud tradition of providing high-quality care to veterans in a historic, peaceful setting -- and disrespect the strong preference among veterans and the community to keep Battle Mountain Sanitarium open.</p> <p>Abandoning the Battle Mountain Sanitarium campus would certainly leave this National Historic Landmark vulnerable to deterioration and demolition and Hot Springs without its largest employer. The VA's analysis does not adequately address the impact of losing 290 full-time employees from Hot Springs. Such a loss will remove a substantial portion of the Hot Springs workforce from the labor market, dramatically decreasing the tax base, which will likely lead to reduced public services in and around the city of Hot Springs.</p> <p>In addition, many of Hot Springs' businesses and residents are reliant on the VA for their livelihood. If the VA no longer has a presence at the Battle Mountain Sanitarium, the impact on the downtown historic district will likely be store closings and vacant buildings that will invite neglect and deterioration.</p> <p>The use of Native American sacred sites at and near the sanitarium would also be threatened should the complex be closed and access restricted.</p> <p>Continuing to use Battle Mountain Sanitarium would give the VA an opportunity to responsibly steward its historic properties while avoiding the severe social, economic, and cultural impacts that closing this site would cause. It would also allow the VA to avoid its long history of substantial cost overruns on major construction projects, as rehabilitation of existing buildings is more often than not less expensive than new construction.</p> <p>Please honor Battle Mountain Sanitarium's past by investing in its future.</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p>	<p><i>Fifty-five copies of a form letter were received.</i></p> <p>F1-1: Your support to keep the Hot Springs campus open is noted and included in the public record. VA notes that it has selected a new preferred alternative (A-2) in the Final EIS which includes renovation and use of Building 12 on the existing campus as the new CBOC. VHA is also proposing to use Buildings 3 and 4 as a national pharmacy call center. If implemented, these actions continue a VA presence on at least a portion of the campus.</p> <p>F1-2: VA is concerned about the long-term preservation of the historic buildings of the Hot Springs VA campus. If any building is scheduled to be unoccupied for more than three months, VA will contract an experienced professional to develop and implement a plan to preserve the buildings. See Section 5.2.2 for more information about this measure and others to resolve adverse effects to historic properties.</p> <p>F1-3: No Native American Tribes came forward to identify or confirm that there are sacred sites or Traditional Cultural Properties on the site of the Hot Springs VA campus. Therefore, a change in use of the campus would not be expected to restrict access. A change in access under Alternative G cannot be guaranteed for the longer term without knowing the final reuse, however, VA will remain in communication with Native American Tribes through the OTGR, and will work with Tribes requesting access in the future.</p>

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<p><i>Seven of the letters included original text additions:</i></p> <p>Keeping the sanitarium in operation is a win-win-win: good for Hot Springs, good for our veterans and a signal to our youth that our heritage matters.</p> <p>*****</p> <p>I went to Hot Springs two years ago on a trip to Mount Rushmore. I spent time and money in the historic town. If the town had boarded-up or vacant buildings, or if it appeared to be a "dead" place rather than an alive and interesting one, I wouldn't have stopped. I'm sure you could multiply my feelings many times over. The result would be a huge decrease in tourist dollars.</p> <p>The new hospital in Colorado Springs, for example, is an example of excessive cost overruns.</p> <p>*****</p> <p>Can't these buildings be remodeled at much lower cost than building new?</p> <p>*****</p> <p>They just built the Michael J Fitzmaurice Veterans Home in Hot Springs - why would you move the sanitarium out ? It makes no sense for health, wealth or well being of anyone to spend too much to move it anywhere. Save the Sanitarium.</p> <p>*****</p> <p>If we have enough money to support people from other countries we must support those who have defended us.</p> <p>*****</p> <p>In addition to the many residents of Hot Springs who depend upon the VA for employment, many businesses in the community also depend upon the VA's presence for their livelihood. Loss of the Battle Mountain Sanitarium would hurt residents and businesses alike and result in economic hardship for the community.</p> <p>The Sanitarium's value both as a symbol for the community and an attraction for visitors should not be underestimated. Last year I visited the area and stayed in Hot Springs, and spent the better part of the day exploring the community and walking around the beautiful Battle Mountain Sanitarium campus. The Sanitarium is not only a unique and beautiful architectural marvel, but it is designed and situated in such a way as to create a peaceful and restful setting for veterans. This was immediately apparent to me as an outsider, and I am sure even more apparent to those who call the area home.</p> <p>In such a small community as Hot Springs, it is quite likely that no other group would be able to afford to purchase the site and adapt such a large facility for a new use. If left vacant and unmaintained, the Sanitarium and its grounds will invite vandalism and the buildings will suffer deterioration and become a safety hazard and an eyesore to the community. In contrast, by adaptively rehabilitating the buildings to meet today's needs, the VA would save a community and national architectural treasure from destruction and keep hundreds of people employed in the town. Furthermore, rehabilitation would save millions of dollars of taxpayer money from being spent on building an expensive new facility elsewhere. New construction is almost always more</p>	<p><i>Seven of the letters included original text additions.</i></p> <p>F1-4: VA's history of cost overruns on past construction projects is not within the scope of the EIS to address.</p> <p>F1-5: While renovation costs are typically less than new construction for general buildings, renovation costs at Battle Mountain Sanitarium (at least to renovate Building 12 for a new CBOC) have been estimated at a higher cost than new construction (see additional breakout of alternative costs in Chapter 2, e.g., Table 2-2 for Alternatives A-1 and A-2). This is due to a combination of factors, including the type of building material and the fact that the campus facilities are part of Battle Mountain Sanitarium National Historic Landmark which requires adherence to strict renovation standards.</p> <p>F1-6: The purpose and need for change is outlined in Chapter 1 of the EIS. Under the proposed reconfiguration, primary care would still be provided in Hot Springs (on the existing campus under the new preferred Alternative A-2) and Veterans would also have more options for health care under the expanded Care in the Community Program. The State Veterans Home in Hot Springs contracts with local community health care providers for their residents primary care needs. VA acknowledges commenter's support to keep the Hot Springs campus open.</p> <p>F1-7: VA agrees. Our mission is to provide high-quality, safe and accessible health care for our Veterans.</p> <p>F1-8: Socioeconomic impacts from the proposed reconfiguration, including impacts on the local economy, are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.16 in the Final EIS. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to socioeconomic impacts.</p>

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<p>expensive than rehabilitation or retrofitting existing buildings. Rehabilitating the Sanitarium will enable the VA to be a better steward of taxpayer money.</p>	<p>F1-9: VA is aware of the importance of VAMC jobs to the local Hot Springs economy and the potential impact of economic difficulties on the downtown commercial buildings. Under the preferred alternative, VA is seeking to avoid these impacts through implementation of Supplemental Alternative G. Reuse of the campus has the potential to avoid and/or minimize economic difficulties and therefore long-term impacts to the buildings of the historic district. The preferred alternative also has the potential to minimize impacts from vandalism and safety concerns by retaining some VA healthcare services, and thus a continued VA presence, on campus. VA further mitigated effects to the Hot Springs Historic District in the Measures to Adverse Effects described in Section 5.2.</p>
<p>I strongly urge the VA to honor Battle Mountain Sanitarium by investing in the future of the facility, its local community, and the veterans to whom the place means so much.</p>	
<p>***** In addition, many of Hot Springs' businesses and residents are reliant on the VA for their livelihood. If the VA no longer has a presence at the Battle Mountain Sanitarium, the impact on the downtown historic district will be extremely detrimental.</p>	
<p>These [Native American] sites are essential for a continuum of millennium old life ways and will be severely curtailed without sustained access ...refurbishing the historic structures would in the long run be a wiser use of taxpayer monies.</p>	<p>F1-3</p>

