

Environmental Assessment

For a conversion of land protected under Section 6(f)3 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act

Memorial Field

Project # 23-00690, 23-00818, and 23-00228
Skowhegan, Maine

Submitted By:

Project Sponsor

Town of Skowhegan
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Submitted To:

State Liaison Officer

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Chapter 1 – Purpose, Need, Background

The Town of Skowhegan, Maine, proposes to convert federal protection from an existing Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) parcel; Project # 23-00690, 23-00818, and 23-00228 (all of which share the same Section 6(f) boundary) occupying 17.51+/- acres. This proposal replaces the total of these lots with a vacant 37.41+/- acre parcel. This Environmental Assessment has been developed for the National Parks Service (NPS) to provide an understanding of any and all impacts relocation will have on the public and surrounding environment.

This conversion will result from a proposed school construction project for Maine School Administrative District No. 54 that will be constructed in Town. The Town and the School have worked together closely to identify a conversion solution that provides an exciting opportunity to enhance access to outdoor public recreation in the community as well as to locate the proposed school in the best possible location for the community. This solution will further increase the walkable and bikeable aspect of the community in accessing both public education and public outdoor recreation and will increase the community's access to outdoor public recreation facilities.

As part of the intensive public process to determine the best possible location for a new school in the community, the public process also considered the walkable and bikeable needs of the community, as well as the community's need for public outdoor recreation. The proposed new school use will include outdoor recreational facilities as part of the new school. However, we are not requesting a partial conversion, but are instead requesting a conversion in whole of Memorial Field, and the replacement parkland and new park improvements on the replacement site will more than replace the existing facilities, without counting any of the additional facilities that will be part of the new school. The result will therefore be a net increase to the outdoor recreational facilities available to the community, as well as a school located in the best possible location for the community.

Chapter 2 - Description of Alternatives

Alternative A: Proposed Conversion

The proposed conversion removes federal protection from an existing LWCF boundary and replaces it with a new parcel strategically located adjacent to the Skowhegan High School. This alternative was selected to allow the construction of the new Margaret Chase Smith School with improved recreation areas at both sites.

The existing recreation facilities within the 6(f)(3) boundary cover approximately 18 acres of land and are adjacent to the existing school and include tennis courts, baseball & softball fields, a playground and a hard surface play area.

The conversion would occur in concert with construction of the new school building at this existing site. New construction would include new athletic fields, tennis courts, creation of a park and maintain the existing playground. These plans can be viewed in more detail on Exhibit C.

The proposed conversion would facilitate the creation of a more robust set of resources on a 37-acre parcel of land. New recreation resources would include: two youth soccer fields, tennis courts, a softball/little league field, baseball field and bicycle/pedestrian pathways connecting the High School, all recreation fields/courts and the Skowhegan Community Center in one network. These plans can be

viewed in more detail in Exhibit D.

In summary, this strategic path forward will maintain resources at the existing site post-conversion, and creation of new resources at the newly designated parcel, generating a substantial net gain of outdoor recreation resources for the community.

Alternative B: No Action

Under the “No Action” Alternative the LWCF 6(f)(3) boundary located adjacent to the Margaret Chase Smith School would remain intact. This alternative was not selected as it would prohibit the construction of a school on the proposed selected site. If the boundary remains intact, the existing school building would remain the only resource available. Continuing to be undersized when compared to the increasing need in Skowhegan.

If Alternative B were selected planning on the new school building and recreation fields project would need to halt. There would be no increase in available recreation resources for the community and the School system and Town of Skowhegan would have to begin seeking out parcels for building a new school able accommodate their population. This process was avoided at the outset due to the low inventory of suitable or available land in the area.

Chapter 3 - Affected Environment

Geologic Resources

There are no known significant geologic resources at the proposed site.

Air Quality

There are no known, and would be no impacts to air quality at the site.

Noise

There are no known or anticipated noise impacts at the site. The proposed site has residential abutters with adequate nature barriers and abuts the High School to the west.

Water Quality

No static or flowing surface or subsurface streams or ponds exist at the proposed site

Land Use

There are no known effects or conflicts with existing land use ordinances, easements or zoning.

Transportation and Accessibility

There is currently no vehicular access to the proposed replacement site. Access to the recreation fields would be through pathways that connect to the abutting High School and Community Center, each having public parking areas with more than enough capacity to meet any need as a result of this project.

Wildlife Habitat and Biological Resources

There are two small Wetland areas located within the proposed replacement parcel boundary that are included in the national wetland inventory map. Neither area maintains a significant habitat in size, complexity or biodiversity. Across multiple visits to the site, the area seems to be fairly dried out. Likely due to natural shifts in rainfall and there being no flowing or surface water sources nearby.

Recreation

The existing LWCF designated area containing Memorial Field currently consists of tennis courts, baseball & softball fields, a playground and a hard surface play area across approximately 18 acres of land.

The proposed replacement parcel is 37 acres and currently has no recreation resources.

Aesthetics

The existing 6(f)(3) designated site is located in a mixed residential/commercial area adjacent to the Margaret Chase Smith School, the school bus yard, a wooded area.

The proposed replacement site is a mostly flat, gently rolling parcel. There is some lightly wooded area around the Northeast edge but is mostly open field with some powerlines visible on the eastern side, though these are mostly hidden by trees. The parcel abuts the Skowhegan Area High School to the West/Southwest, residential areas to the Northwest and East, as well as the Skowhegan Community Center to the North. There are no existing structures on the site.

Historical and Cultural Resources

There are no known historical or cultural resources on the existing or proposed parcel.

Socioeconomics

According to the 2010 census, Skowhegan Maine has a population of 8,589. The population is fairly evenly spread out, though is at its most dense surrounding the downtown area and along the route 2 and 201 corridors. The existing 6(f)(3) bound site is within the dense downtown area. The proposed replacement site is approximately 1 mile from the true downtown of Skowhegan and is surrounded by multiple residential areas and within a half mile as well as the High School abutting the parcel to one side, and the Skowhegan Community Center on the other.

Chapter 4 - Environmental Impacts

Noise

The existing Memorial Field site will have negligible impacts on noise due to the conversion. As there is already a school and recreation fields located on site, the replacement school and fields as a result of the conversion would not alter the noise level beyond its current impact.

At the replacement site there will be negligible impacts on noise due to the conversion. Creation of the athletic/recreation fields and courts will create a small increase of the noise level when compared to the site's current status as a vacant lot. However, the proposed replacement site sits between a High School and Community center and would not exceed any pre-existing levels of noise currently impacting the area.

Water Quality

There are no known or anticipated water quality impacts at the existing 6(f)(3) site as a result of the proposed conversion.

There are no known or anticipated water quality impacts at the proposed replacement site. There will be no additional parking areas created. Any minor impervious surfaces created (walking/bicycle paths) will meet the State of Maine storm water regulations.

Land Use

There are no land use impacts at either the existing or proposed site as a result of this conversion.

Transportation & Accessibility

There will be no new vehicular access points created as a result of this conversion. Existing parking amenities are available at both abutting School and Community Center properties. Pedestrian access will be via pedestrian/bicycle pathways connecting the recreation fields to each parking area. See Exhibit D for a more detailed view of this plan.

Wildlife Habitat & Biological Resources

There are no wildlife habitat or biological resources that will have any significant impacts as a result of the proposed conversion. The existing site does not contain any significant habitat or resources to be impacted. The proposed replacement site has two noted wetland areas as was described in Chapter 3. These areas will have no significant impacts due to the conversion. Recreation resources would not cause any removal or shrinkage of these resources and would not have any impacts or cause any shifts to the existing natural stormwater or runoff pattern/flow.

Recreation

The Maine State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) includes a simple, overarching priority for outdoor recreation in Maine to help strengthen communities. This proposed conversion meets that goal for Skowhegan. The first listed Main theme prioritized in the 2020-2024 SCORP is to 'Support Active, Engaged Communities'.

This proposed conversion would be putting an investment into Skowhegan's long term outdoor recreation resources. As seen in detail in Exhibits C & D the existing site will maintain all existing forms of recreation resources while adding new ones, as well as a park/greenspace desperately needed for the residential area. While the proposed conversion site will be creating a bevy of new resources for the community in a strategic location adjacent to both the Community Center & High School. Providing walking and bicycle paths, tennis courts, fields for youth soccer, little league, softball and baseball as well as connecting these resources to existing playgrounds, community gardens and parks at the community center. This substantial net gain in public outdoor recreation resources—and improved access to those resources—will continue the Town's already steady investment into the area's recreation infrastructure.

Aesthetics

The existing site will be converted from the 6(f)(3) status to be used for the new school building needed by the community. Assuming the boundary be converted to the proposed site, this would allow for a new structure fitting in more seamlessly with the surrounding residential area than the existing dilapidated commercial-looking school building. This site would be surrounded by greenspace with a new park designated where the current school building sits, as well as multi-use recreation fields and refreshed landscaping.

The proposed conversion site, which is currently vacant land, would be improved by installing a proper landscaping and maintenance schedule to ensure the land these recreation resources lie on will be appropriately cared for.

There would be no negative impacts to the aesthetics of the site as a result of the conversion, it would remain partially wooded around the edges of the parcel.

Historical and Cultural Resources

There are no resources affected by the proposed conversion

Socioeconomics

The proposed conversion would have only positive impacts to the community. Providing a substantial net gain of public recreation resources for all ages at multiple locations improves ease of access and community health standards.

Chapter 5 - Coordination and Consultation

Persons, Organizations, and agencies involved

Parties involved in the Environmental Assessment included: RSU/MSAD 54, the Town of Skowhegan, Carroll Associates Landscape Architects, Legacy Appraisal Services, Forest Research & Valuation, Kennebec Valley Council of Governments and the Bureau of Parks & Lands Outdoor Recreation Supervisor.

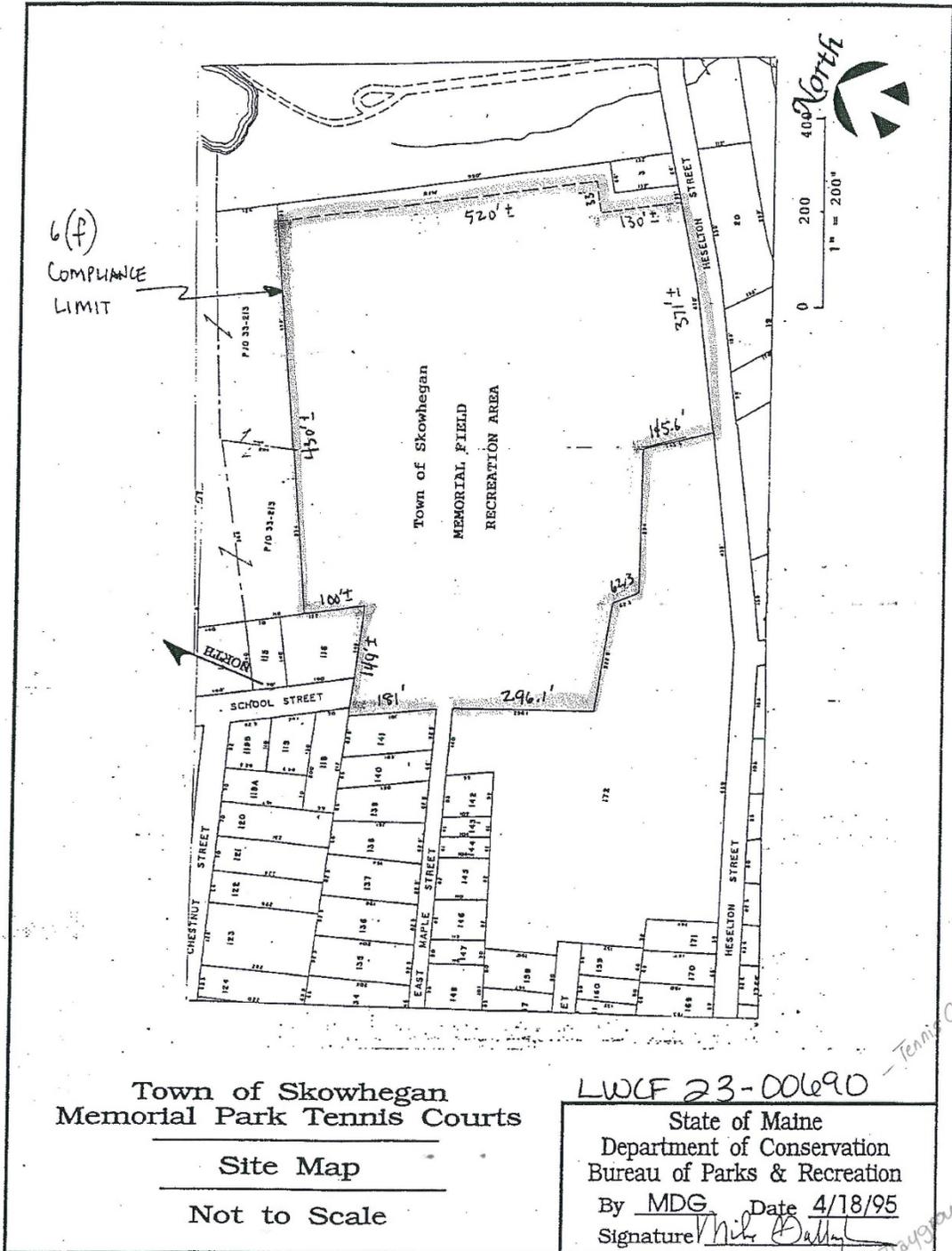
Public Involvement

The proposed conversion, site plans, environmental assessment, appraisals, and all other related documentation will be posted for public comment for 30 days.

Appendices:

Exhibit A – Existing 6(f)(3) Site Overhead





23-0022B
11-25-74
Tennis Courts

LWCF 23-00818 (same map)

Exhibit C – Existing 6(f)(3) Site plans post-conversion

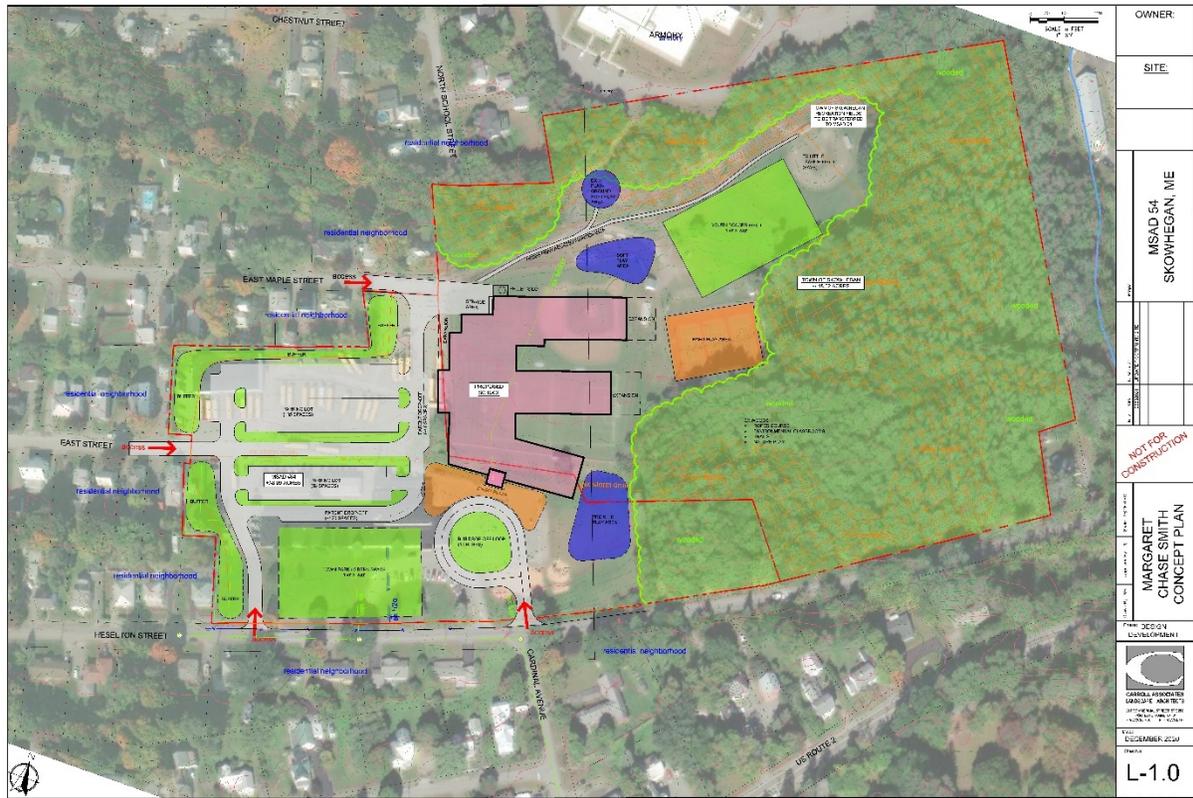


EXHIBIT B - Ltr to Beck

Exhibit D – Proposed Replacement site Parcel Plan



EXHIBIT C - Ltr to Beck

Exhibit E – Replacement Site Overhead W/Wetland areas marked in Blue



Exhibit F – Environmental Screening Form

Attached as a separate document

Exhibit G – Public Comments

To Be Added