

**United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency**

June 16, 2011

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (USDA FSA) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) have drafted a programmatic environmental assessment to evaluate the environmental consequences associated with providing Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant funds to the State of Washington. The VPA-HIP is a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill). It provides grants to States and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily open land for public access for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, and other outdoor activities. Projects receiving VPA-HIP funds are administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant.

The State of Washington, through the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), proposes to use VPA-HIP funds to expand upon its long history of working with landowners to provide public access on private lands through various voluntary access programs.

The environmental assessment considers the environmental baseline and the environmental effects expected to result from using the funds to expand public access for hunting and wildlife watching, and to retain corn stubble for wildlife, on selected private lands. The purpose of this public comment period is to identify new data about potential environmental effects; that data will be considered in the implementation of the program.

In a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the USDA FSA finds that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.

The full text of the FONSI and environmental assessment is available on-line for review and comments at: http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/sepa/sepa_comment_docs.html

We will consider all comments in our evaluation of the adequacy of this environmental assessment. Comments must be received by close of business on Thursday July 21, 2011. If this public comment period does not identify new significant data or controversial issues, the environmental assessment and FONSI will be considered final.

Sincerely,



Matthew T. Ponish
United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency