

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Washington State Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

November 2011

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) has prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) to evaluate the environmental consequences associated with providing the State of Washington additional Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) grant funds. The VPA-HIP is a program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) that 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 additional VPA-HIP funds to expand public access for hunting and fishing, and to improve habitat for wildlife. VPA-HIP funds will be used through a combination of landowner incentive payments and physical improvements to facilitate and encourage access opportunities through three additions to its existing VPA-HIP program.

PROPOSED ACTION

1. Optimizing Hunting on CRP

Establish one replicated Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) inter-seeding demonstration plot per county in existing CRP in Columbia, Garfield, Lincoln, Walla Walla and Whitman Counties during the first year of the project including:

- Stopping at demonstration plots on Conservation District annual field tours with producers and partners potentially during the second and third years of the Project.
- Incorporating results in Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Technical Notes in cooperation with NRCS Plant Materials Specialist.
- Present outcomes to Washington Grain Alliance and other producer groups interested in results.
- Develop a brochures and location on WDFW's private lands website covering CRP inter-seeding techniques demonstrated by this project.
- Use demonstration results to secure commitments for three implementation projects in each of the five counties in the project area, for a total of 15 projects during the third year of the project.

2. Private Forest Land Access

Establish public access on at least 20,000 additional acres of private forest lands in eastern Washington.

3. Feel Free to Fish

Enroll 27 miles of both sides of the Walla Walla and/or Touchet Rivers in the Feel Free to Fish program.

REASONS FOR FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In consideration of the analysis documented in the PEA and the reasons outlined in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), the Proposed Action would not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment. The state of Washington notes that there will be no additional SEPA process for this action. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared, and WDFW will not have a separate SEPA comment period. The determination is based on the following:

1. The Proposed Action as outlined in the PEA would provide beneficial impacts to both recreation and economic resources as a result of the increased amount of land available for public use and monies from these activities injected into local economies. Moreover, expanding lands available for wildlife-associated recreation would benefit vegetation and wildlife by maintaining suitable habitat rather than converting the land to another incompatible use.
2. Potential beneficial and adverse impacts of implementing the Proposed Action have been fully considered within the PEA. No significant adverse direct or indirect effects were identified, based on the resource analyses provided in the PEA.
3. The Proposed Action would not involve effects to the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial.
4. The Proposed Action would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
5. The Proposed Action does not result in cumulative significant impacts when considered with other actions that also individually have insignificant impacts. Cumulative impacts of implementing the Proposed Action were determined to be not significant.
6. The Proposed Action would not have adverse effects on threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat.
7. The Proposed Action does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

DETERMINATION

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and FSA's environmental regulations at 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 799 implementing the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality, 40 CFR parts 1500-1508, I find the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Barring any new data identified during public and agency review of the PEA that would dramatically change the analysis presented in the PEA or identification of a significant controversial issue, the PEA and

FONSI are considered final 30 days after the date of initial publication of the Notice of Availability.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juan M. Garcia". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

11/15/2011

Approved:

Signature

Date