

Finding of No Significant Impact
Cattle Fever Tick Eradication on Laguna Atascosa and Lower Rio Grande Valley National
Wildlife Refuges
Environmental Assessment
February 2018

By preventing the establishment of cattle fever ticks (CFT) in the United States north of the Permanent Tick Quarantine Zone, the cattle fever tick eradication program (CFTEP) simultaneously eliminates the disease bovine babesiosis from the U.S. cattle population. The current increase in infestations combined with a high frequency of infestations occurring outside the Permanent Tick Quarantine Zone suggest current CFTEP inspection and treatment activities may be insufficient to ensure adequate protection of the U.S. livestock industry in the future. Therefore, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA) proposed to study methods of treatment and eradication on Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge (LANWR) and Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge (LRGVNWR), which are part of the South Texas Refuge Complex.

In December 2017, the USDA and U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) analyzing the potential environmental consequences of implementing both current and additional CFT eradication strategies on LANWR and LRGVNWR. Results from the evaluation of potential environmental impacts associated with these permitted activities are described in the EA, and incorporated by reference in this document. The EA is available from:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Veterinary Services
2150 Centre Ave Bldg. B
Fort Collins, CO 80526

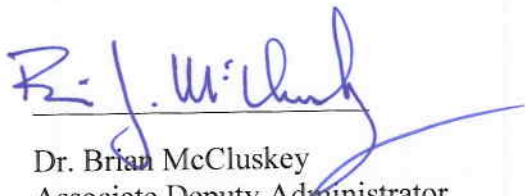
The EA analyzed the alternatives of (A) continue CFT eradication efforts on LANWR and LRGVNWR, which includes modifications to/ expansions of white-tailed deer/nilgai hunting opportunities, nilgai reductions, landowner discussions, prescribed burning, and other USDA-APHIS CFT eradication program activities off-refuge (current management), and (B) implement both current and additional CFT eradication strategies, including using ivermectin-treated corn to treat white-tailed deer and conducting experimental cattle grazing on LANWR and LRGVNWR lands that fall within established quarantine areas (preferred alternative). The USFWS would administer the management activities described in the preferred alternative through Special Use Permits.

USDA and USFWS announced the availability of this EA for a 30-day public comment period via the APHIS Stakeholder Registry and a refuge press release. The comment period ended on January 22, 2018. The agencies received 187 comments. A summary of these comments and responses is included as an appendix to the EA.

USDA and USFWS determined there are no disproportionate adverse effects associated with the

preferred alternative to children, minority populations, or low income populations over those effects to the general population, in accordance with Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations*, and Executive Order 13045, *Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks*.

I find that implementation of the proposed program will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment. I have considered and based my finding of no significant impact on the environment on the analysis contained within the EA. Because I have not found evidence of significant environmental impacts associated with the program, I find that an environmental impact statement does not need to be prepared and that the program may proceed.



Dr. Brian McCluskey
Associate Deputy Administrator
Surveillance, Preparedness, and Response Services
Veterinary Services
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

2-12-18

Date