



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Rangeland Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Suppression Program Environmental Assessment for New Mexico EA Number: NM-23-01

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) that analyzes alternatives for suppressing grasshopper and Mormon cricket outbreaks on rangeland in New Mexico. The 2023 draft EA was posted for public comment on March 20th, 2023 and available until April, 19th, 2023. APHIS received comments from two entities on this document. The 2023 Environmental Assessment, incorporated by reference in this document, is available for review at USDA-APHIS-PPQ at 125 Valencia Drive NE Suite B, Albuquerque, NM 87108 or USDA-APHIS-PPQ at 270 South 17th Street, Las Cruces, New Mexico 88005.

Decision and Rationale

The EA includes an analysis of the potential impacts of three alternatives. They included No Action (1) and Insecticide Applications at Conventional Rates and Complete Area Coverage or Reduced Agent Area Treatments (RAATs) (2). The Reduced Agent Area Treatment alternative is considered to be the preferred alternative. APHIS participation in this suppression program is at the official request for technical assistance from Federal, State and private land managers, when grasshopper populations have reached a level of economic infestation in a specific area. In an effort to reduce the further destruction to rangeland vegetation, APHIS is authorized under the Plant Protection Act (PPA) 7 (United States Code ~ 7701 *et seq.*), and state law to protect rangeland from economic damage by grasshopper or Mormon cricket infestations.

Alternatives Considered

No Action alternative results in continued economic damage and losses, and extended recovery time. Conventional Rates and Complete Area Coverage alternative results in additional chemical needed, time and workload increases, and higher application costs. Reduced Agent Area Treatments alternative would result in reduced chemical needed, decreases in time and workload and lower application costs. This is the preferred alternative. Experimental Treatment alternatives may be done as research projects and are included on page 9 and in Appendix F of the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

APHIS has determined that the proposed suppression program, conducted in accordance with the Guidelines for Treatment of Rangeland Grasshoppers and Mormon Crickets, which contains the operational procedures and managerial flexibility, will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment.

The finding of no significant impact was determined for the following:

1. Human health: Potential exposures from RAATs application rates are commensurately lower

than from conventional application rates. These low exposures to the general public and workers pose a negligible risk. The rural areas for planned treatment on rangeland are away from the normal movement of the general public, and in general have limited or restrictive access. Experimental treatments are limited in scope and therefore pose a low risk to human health, non-target fish and wildlife.

2. Non-targets: Risk is low for most non-target fish and wildlife. The use of RAATs reduces the risk for terrestrial vertebrates and invertebrates. Proposed buffers will ensure aquatic habitats and riparian areas are protected. While some sensitive terrestrial invertebrates may be impacted, our pre-treatment, treatment and post-treatment environmental monitoring is part of the APHIS treatment guidelines (APHIS Directive 5640.1) and is a work activity strictly adhered to. These monitoring and program measures are designed to select and use pesticides that will reduce risk to non-targets.
3. APHIS has determined that the proposed action will have no effect on the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Jemez Mountains salamander (*Plethodon neomexicanus*), Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*), Razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*), Rio Grande silvery minnow (*Hybognathus amarus*), Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkia Virginalis*), Knowlton's cactus (*Pediacactus knowltonii*), Mancos milk-vetch (*Astragalus humillimus*), Mesa Verde cactus (*Sclerocactus mesae-verdae*), Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), and the Silverspot (*Speyeria nokomis Nokomis*).

APHIS has determined the suppression program may affect, is not likely to adversely affect, the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*), Mexican Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus bayleyi*), Mexican Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus neomexicanus*), and the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Astragalus humillimus*), APHIS submitted a 2023 Biological Assessment to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) New Mexico Ecological Services field office in Albuquerque, New Mexico and received a Letter of Concurrence (2023-0081664). All required buffers and other protective measures will be verified with the USFWS prior to treatment. Furthermore, appropriate environmental monitoring will occur before, during and after chemical application.

4. Socioeconomic issues: Ranchers (livestock owners) are the major social group impacted by rangeland grasshopper infestations. Losses occur from reduced range forage for livestock. Reduced forage on rangeland results in lower quality forage for livestock, which could impact the health of the animals, and the need to purchase supplemental feed or reduce the number of livestock grazing which results in an economic hardship for the rancher.
5. Cultural resources and events: No cultural resources or events will be affected negatively by any proposed treatments. In fact, a suppression treatment should help reduce the insect annoyance and property damage concerns at some of these events and be considered an actual benefit.

The time between the receipt of a request for treatment and the start of a suppression program is very short. In order to inform the public and give them time to submit comments on the

proposed program, APHIS is making this EA available at this time. Once a treatment request is received and it has been determined that a suppression program will take place, APHIS will prepare a supplemental determination to re-examine potential program effects on the quality of the human environment. The supplemental determination will be provided to all parties that commented on the 2023 EA by APHIS.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts discussed in the EA, the implementation of the treatment guidelines (containing the operational procedures) and protective measures for endangered and threatened species, I have determined that the proposed suppression program will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment.

Shawn Carson /s/

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State Plant Health Director New Mexico

June 2 2023

Date