

Finding of No Significant Impact for the Cogongrass Control Program in the Southeastern United States – Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina

Environmental Assessment June 2020

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) prepared a draft environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the impacts of funding treatments for cogongrass control in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina. The final EA is incorporated into this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) by reference and is available at the APHIS website at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/ea/> or at:

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The draft EA evaluated two alternatives: (1) no action, and (2) an integrated management program, the preferred alternative. The draft EA evaluated the potential impacts to human health and the environment from the no action alternative and the preferred alternative where USDA-APHIS provides funding for an integrated cogongrass management program in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. The integrated management program consists of preventative (e.g., education and outreach), cultural (e.g., burning), mechanical (e.g., tilling, mowing, disking), and chemical (e.g., herbicide) methods that have been proven effective in current State efforts to control cogongrass. USDA-APHIS prepared a draft EA that was published in regulations.gov on March 2, 2020 to begin a 30-day public comment period. USDA-APHIS also released an announcement through its stakeholder registry. USDA-APHIS received 11 comments during the public comment period. USDA-APHIS responded to comments and updated the final EA, where appropriate.

APHIS has determined that the integrated control program for cogongrass will not have adverse impacts to human health. The proposed mechanical, cultural and chemical control methods for cogongrass pose minimal risk to human health based on available data and the proposed methods of treatment described in the final EA. The preferred alternative will have negligible impacts to the environment including soil, water and air quality, as well as non-target fish and wildlife. Cogongrass removal will benefit some non-target species due to the impacts of cogongrass on native habitats.

APHIS prepared two programmatic biological assessments, and requested concurrence with these determinations for the appropriate species under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). USDA-APHIS submitted the biological assessment to the USFWS on September 16, 2019. USDA-APHIS

received concurrence on the USFWS biological assessment on January 22, 2020. USDA-AHIS revised the biological assessment submitted to NMFS and made a no effect determination for species under the jurisdiction of NMFS based on the use of standard aquatic buffers for the cogongrass program that are listed in the final EA.

There are no disproportionate adverse effects to minorities, low-income populations, or children, 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 have determined that there would be no significant impact on the quality of the human environment from the implementation of the preferred alternative. APHIS' finding of no significant impact from the preferred alternative is based on the results of the analysis in this EA. Lastly, because I have not found evidence of significant environmental impact associated with the proposed program, I further find that no additional environmental documentation needs to be prepared and that the program may proceed.

Anne LeBrun
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Plant Protection and Quarantine
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Date