Finding of No Significant Impact

Asian Longhorned Beetle Program in Charleston, Colleton, and Dorchester Counties, South Carolina, Environmental Assessment - September 2020

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the eradication of the Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) from Charleston, Colleton, and Dorchester Counties, South Carolina. The EA is tiered to the programmatic environmental impact statement (EIS) published in September 2015. The 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 from USDA APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine, 4700 River Road, Unit 137, Riverdale, MD 20737-1229.

The agency made the draft EA available to the public for a 30-day public comment period beginning on August 18, 2020. The agency published the notice of availability on Regulations.gov, the APHIS website, through the APHIS Stakeholder Registry, in the local newspaper, social media posts through Facebook and Twitter accounts, and through email channels. The agency received comments on the EA from two responders, both in support of the eradication effort. The comments did not result in significant changes to the analysis. The response to comments is in appendix 3 of the final EA.

Under alternative A (no action alternative), the program would not take action to eradicate ALB. The program may conduct surveys to find out the extent of the infestation and set quarantines to slow the spread of the insect. This alternative poses the greatest potential for unfavorable effects due to ALB.

Alternative B (preferred alternative) is an eradication strategy. The program would remove infested trees. For high risk host trees within a half-mile radius of an infested tree, the program would use a combination of tree removal, tree girdling in wetlands with infestations 3 acres or greater in size, and chemical treatment. Conditions such as host tree density and distribution, insecticide efficacy, environmental conditions, and logistical constraints require an adaptive management approach to eradicate ALB. This approach with ALB eradication is similar to strategies that have been implemented for other infestations in the United States. Before removing, girdling, or treating high risk host trees, the program would ask landowners for permission. If the landowner does not allow these actions, the program will continue survey activities and remove or girdle trees if they become infested.

The program does not expect its eradication activities to have significant impacts to human health and the environment. While isolated areas of concentrated tree removal may occur, logistical constraints regarding removal suggests that the total number of trees that could be removed per year is small relative to the remaining number of trees within the quarantined area and counties. The number of impacted trees from removal would be expected to decrease even further over time as infestations are identified and eradication strategies are implemented,

reducing the spread of ALB. This would also apply to the amount of pesticide use proposed under the preferred alternative. The proposed use pattern for each pesticide as well its fate and toxicity, as discussed in the EA, suggest that significant impacts to the environment would not be anticipated.

Impacts of tree removal or imidacloprid applications on wood products, wildlife, forests, parks, firewood, and residential trees are not expected to be significant because of the limited number of host trees that can be treated or removed compared to the total number of trees in the three counties, and because the program has the flexibility to choose the most appropriate treatment of high risk host trees depending on site-specific characteristics.

Impacts of imidacloprid and tree removal or girdling on air, water, and soil quality are not expected to be significant. The low number of trees that would be removed or girdled relative to the total number available, the small incremental improvement in air quality from trees in large urban areas, and the replanting of areas with grass and non-ALB host trees would not result in significant negative impacts to air quality parameters (e.g., particulate matter and other pollutants) within the current quarantine area or the three counties. Under the preferred alternative, removal of high risk host trees would be limited in areas where soil is erodible, and with the implementation of best management practices would reduce impacts to soil and water and would not be expected to result in significant watershed impacts.

Impacts from the use of the herbicides used by the program are not significant. The potential for off-site movement via drift or runoff is very small as it would only be applied by hand sprayer or painted directly on the stumps of cut host material.

The agency conducted a Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for ALB detection and eradication activities. The agency has determined that the preferred alternative, after implementing protective measures, may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat in the three counties. On July 17, 2020, the USFWS concurred with this determination. The agency made a no effect determination for species under NMFS jurisdiction. On July 21, 2020, the NMFS responded this determination was appropriate. The program does not anticipate significant impacts to bald and golden eagles and migratory birds.

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." The program will to continue to coordinate with the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office to ensure the program will have no impact to historic properties, including sites of tribal importance, pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

I have determined that there would be no significant impact on the quality of the human environment from the implementation of the preferred alternative. The agency's finding of no significant impact from the preferred alternative is based on past experience with ALB

eradication efforts and the evaluation of potential impacts to human health and the environment analyzed 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.

PAUL CHALOUX Digitally signed by PAUL CHALOUX
Date: 2020.09.28 08:16:00 -04'00'

National Program Manager
Plant Protection and Quarantine
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Date