DECISION
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT – REDUCING BLACKBIRD DAMAGE TO SPROUTING RICE THROUGH AN INTEGRATED WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IN SOUTHWESTERN LOUISIANA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) program completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for reducing blackbird damage to sprouting rice crops in southwestern Louisiana in September 2001 (USDA 2001). A Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was subsequently signed on September 13, 2001. The purpose of this new Decision/FONSI is to facilitate planning, interagency coordination, and the streamlining of program management; and to clearly communicate with the public the analysis of individual and cumulative impacts of the program since 2001.

The EA evaluated the need for WS activities and the relative effectiveness of four alternatives to meet that need, while accounting for the potential environmental effects of each alternative. The action selected by WS is an Integrated Wildlife Damage Management (IWDM) program on all land classes in southwestern Louisiana. The strategy uses lethal and nonlethal direct control and technical assistance to reduce damage to sprouting rice caused by blackbird species including red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), common grackles (*Quiscalus quiscula*), boat-tailed grackles (*Quiscalus major*), great-tailed grackles (Quiscalus mexicanus), Brewer's blackbirds (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), rusty blackbirds (*Euphagus carolinus*) and European starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*). The EA is tiered to the WS programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (USDA 1997). Copies of the EA and 2001 Decision/FONSI are available for review from USDA/APHIS/WS, P.O. Box 589, Port Allen, Louisiana 70767. Copies of the EIS are available from the USDA/APHIS/WS Operational Support Staff, 4700 River Road, Unit 87, Riverdale, MD 20737-1234.

Wildlife Services is the Federal program authorized by law to reduce damage caused by wildlife (Act of March 2, 1931 (46 Stat. 1468; 7 U.S.C. 426-426b) as amended, and the Act of December 22, 1987 (101 Stat. 1329-331, 7 U.S.C. 426c)). Wildlife damage management is the alleviation of damage or other problems caused by or related to the presence of wildlife, and is recognized as an integral part of wildlife management (The Wildlife Society 1992). WS uses an IWDM approach, commonly known as Integrated Pest Management (WS Directive 2.105) in which a combination of methods may be used or recommended to reduce damage. WS wildlife damage management is not based on punishing offending animals but as one means of reducing damage and is used as part of the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992, USDA 1997, WS Directive 2.201). All WS wildlife damage management activities are in compliance with relevant laws, regulations, policies, orders and procedures, including the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Consistency

The analyses in the EA demonstrate that Alternative 1: 1) best addresses the issues identified in the

and mosquitoes. Mammals can become infected if bitten by an infected mosquito, but individuals in most species of mammals do not become ill from the virus. The most serious manifestation of the WN virus is fatal encephalitis in humans, horses, and birds.

West Nile virus has been detected in dead birds of at least 284 species, including blackbirds (CDC 2005). Although birds infected with WN virus can die or become ill, most infected birds do survive and may subsequently develop immunity to the virus (CDC 2003, Cornell University 2003). In some bird species, particularly Corvids (crows, blue jays, ravens, magpies), the virus causes disease (often fatal) in a large percentage of infected birds (Audubon 2003, CDC 2003, Cornell University 2003, MMWR 2002). In 2002, WN virus surveillance/monitoring programs revealed that Corvids accounted for 90% of the dead birds reported with crows representing the highest rate of infection (MMWR 2002). Large birds that live and die near humans (i.e. crows) have a greater likelihood of being discovered, therefore the reporting rates tend to be higher for these bird species and are a "good indicator" species for the presence of WN virus in a specific area (Cornell University 2003, Audubon 2003).

According to US Geological Survey (USGS), National Wildlife Health Center (2003), information is not currently available to know whether or not WN virus is having an impact on bird populations in North America. USGS states that it is not unusual for a new disease to cause high rates of infection or death because birds do not have the natural immunity to the infection. Furthermore, it is not known how long it will take for specific bird population to develop sufficient immunity to the virus. Surveys of wild birds completed in the last three years have shown that some birds have already acquired antibodies to the virus (USGS-WHC 2003). Based upon available Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys, USGS-WHC (2003) states that there have been declines in observations of many local bird populations, however they do not know if the decline can be attributed to WN virus or to some other cause. A review of available crow population data by Audubon (2003) reveals that at least some local crow populations are suffering high WN virus related mortality, but crow numbers do not appear to be declining drastically across broad geographic areas. USGS does not anticipate that the commonly seen species, such as crows and blue jays, will be adversely affected by the virus to the point that these bird species will disappear from the U.S. (USGS-WHC 2003).

Affected Environment

The areas of the proposed action include lands used in the commercial production of rice in southwestern Louisiana, including the rice producing parishes of Acadia, Allen, Calcasieu, Cameron, Evangeline, Jeff Davis, St. Landry, and Vermilion. Damage problems can occur throughout the southwestern rice producing portions of the State, resulting in requests for WS assistance. Under the proposed action, sprouting rice damage management could be conducted on private lands in southwestern Louisiana upon request. Southwestern Louisiana encompasses about 4,680,000 acres.

Summary of WS Blackbird Damage Management Activities

From 2002-2006, the Louisiana WS program continued to provide technical assistance to rice growers who experienced blackbird damage to sprouting rice. Technical assistance was directed

primarily towards establishment of blackbird harassment programs but also included recommendations for alteration of habitat and cultural practices. Additionally, WS used the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered avicide DRC-1339 to reduce blackbird numbers at staging areas and the associated blackbird damage that occurs near roost sites. Operations were conducted immediately before rice planting season (14 February - 24 March) in order to target birds that cause damage. From 2002 - 2006, WS utilized DRC-1339 at 62, 38, 50, 42, and 30 sites, respectively, with an average of 65 acres being treated with DRC-1339 each year. This represented less than 0.002% of the land area of southwestern Louisiana (WS Management Information System (MIS) 2002-2006).

Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

Four potential alternatives were developed to address the issues identified above. One additional alternative was considered but not analyzed in detail. A detailed discussion of the anticipated effects of the alternatives on the issues is contained in the EA. The following summary provides a brief description of each alternative and its anticipated impacts.

Alternative 1. Continue the Current Integrated Blackbird Damage Management program (No action/Proposed Action). An IWDM strategy would be recommended and used, encompassing the use of practical and effective methods of preventing or reducing damage while minimizing harmful effects of damage management measures on humans, wildlife species, and the environment. Under this action, WS could provide technical assistance and direct operational damage management, including non-lethal and lethal management methods by applying the WS Decision Model (Slate et al. 1992). When appropriate, alteration of cultural practices and habitat and behavioral modification would be recommended and utilized to reduce blackbird damage. In other situations, blackbirds would be lethally removed as humanely as possible using: shooting, trapping, and EPA registered pesticides. In determining the damage management strategy, preference would be given to practical and effective non-lethal methods. However, non-lethal methods may not always be applied as a first response to each damage problem. The most appropriate response could often be a combination of non-lethal and lethal methods, or there could be instances where application of lethal methods alone would be the most appropriate strategy. WS damage management services would be conducted as authorized by various federal and state regulations and would be partially funded by service recipients. WS technical assistance would be funded through WS appropriations. Under this alternative local blackbird populations would be reduced but not to the extent that statewide, regional or continental populations would be adversely affected. Other wildlife species, including threatened and endangered species are not expected to be negatively impacted by this alternative with some bird species receiving beneficial effects from reduction of inter-specific nest competition. No adverse effects are expected to public health and safety from WS use of control methods. This alternative would allow WS to respond to all requests for assistance and has high potential of reducing crop damage to acceptable levels. Some person's aesthetic values would be both positively and negatively affected by this alternative. Species removed during control activities would remain common and abundant throughout their range. Lethal control methods used by WS would be considered humane by most people, but others may consider any method of killing to be inhumane.

Alternative 2. Technical Assistance Only. This alternative would only allow Louisiana WS to provide technical assistance and make lethal and non-lethal management recommendations to individuals or agencies requesting blackbird damage management assistance in southwest Louisiana. Private landowners, contractors, or others could conduct their own damage management on federal, state, county, and private lands. The *"technical assistance only"* alternative would place the immediate burden of operational damage management work on other federal, state or county agencies; private businesses; and property owners. Individuals experiencing blackbird damage would, independently or with Louisiana WS recommendations, carry out and fund damage management activities. Some individuals or agencies would implement damage management as part of the cost of doing business, while other agencies or property owners may choose not to take action to resolve blackbird damage problems. WS technical assistance would be funded through WS appropriations. WS would have no direct impacts under this alternative. Impacts of other persons conducting control activities would be variable dependent upon actions taken. This alternative would allow WS to respond to requests for technical assistance, but would leave some people without a means to effectively reduce blackbird damage on rice crops.

Alternative 3. Non-lethal Damage Management and Technical Assistance. Under this alternative, only non-lethal operational blackbird damage management and lethal and non-lethal technical assistance would be provided by WS. Individuals or agencies might choose to implement WS recommendations or other methods not recommended by WS, contract for WS non-lethal damage management services, or take no action. WS non-lethal damage management services would be conducted as authorized by federal and state regulations and would be partially funded by service recipients. WS technical assistance would be funded through WS appropriations. WS would not lethally remove any target bird species under this alternative and would expect to have no adverse affects on other wildlife species including threatened and endangered species. No adverse effects are expected to public health and safety from WS use of control methods. This alternative would not allow WS to respond to all requests for assistance and would not reduce crop damage to acceptable levels for some individuals. Some person's aesthetic values would be both positively and negatively affected by this alternative. Target species populations would remain common and abundant throughout their range. Most people would consider this alternative humane since WS would not be conducting lethal removal activities. Impacts of other persons conducting control activities would be variable dependent upon actions taken.

Alternative 4. No Federal WS Blackbird Management. This alternative would result in no assistance from WS in managing blackbird damage to sprouting rice in southwestern Louisiana. WS would not provide technical assistance or operational damage management services. All requests for blackbird damage management assistance would be referred to local animal control agencies, or private businesses or organizations. Assistance may or may not be available from any of these entities. Damage management methods could be implemented by resource owners, private businesses, or volunteers. WS would have no direct impacts under this alternative. Impacts of other persons conducting control activities would be variable dependent upon actions taken. This alternative would not allow WS to respond to any requests for assistance and would

leave some people without a means to effectively reduce blackbird damage on rice crops.

Environmental Consequences

Wildlife Services has reviewed the EA and has determined that the environmental impacts on the quality of the human environment from activities conducted pursuant to the EA will continue to be insignificant, and that no substantive changes in the analysis are necessary at this time. The following is a brief summary of potential impacts for each of the major issues analyzed in the EA.

Effects on Target Species: The EA concluded that WS blackbird damage management activities in Louisiana have not significantly impacted blackbird populations on a state, regional or nationwide scale. Precise counts of blackbird populations do not exist but one estimate placed the United States summer population of the blackbird group at over 1 billion (USDA 1997) and the winter population at 500 million (Royall 1977). Natural mortality in blackbird populations is between 50% and 65% of the population each year, regardless of human-caused control operations (USDA 1997). The annual winter population of the blackbird group in the eastern U.S. is at least 372 million (Johnson and Glahn 1994, Meanley and Royall 1976). Dolbeer et al. (1995) showed that WS kills of 3.6% of the wintering population had no effect on breeding populations the following spring. Dolbeer et al. (1976) constructed a population model which indicated that a reduction of 14.8% of the wintering blackbird population would reduce the spring breeding population by 20% and that a 56.2% reduction in the wintering blackbird population would reduce spring breeding populations by only 33%. Given the density-dependent relationships in a blackbird population (i.e. decreased mortality and increased fecundity of surviving birds) a high number of blackbirds would likely have to be killed in order to impact the regional breeding population. In an analysis of North American blackbird populations in 1975, FWS concluded that removal of 67.5 million birds would not affect the following years post-breeding population (USDI 1976). Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend data (Sauer et al. 2006), Christmas Bird Count (CBC) trend data (National Audubon Society 2006), and U.S. winter population estimates by species (Meanley and Royall 1976) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Breeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count trend data from 1966-2005; and U.S. blackbird population estimates by species.

Species	BBS Louisiana	BBS Central Region	BBS Eastern Region	United States	BBS Survey-wide	CBC Louisiana	CBC United States	U.S. Winter Population Estimate
Red-winged blackbird	-1.5%	-0.3%	-1.4%	-0.8%	-0.9%	variable	stable	190 million
Brown-headed cowbird	-2.4%	-0.8%	-1.8%	-0.9%	-1.2%	variable	stable	90 million
Common grackle	-3.5%	-0.9%	-1.2%	-1.2%	-1.1%	stable	decreasing	100 million

Great-tailed grackle	-16.2%	2.9%	n/a	3.4%	3.3%	stable	increasing	600,000** (includes boat-tailed grackles)
Boat-tailed grackle	-0.4%	0.1%	2.1%	1.7%	1.7%	variable	increasing	**See above
Brewer's blackbird	n/a	0.5%	-0.6%	-1.3%	-1.3%	stable	stable	10 million
Rusty blackbird	n/a	n/a	-9.1%	14.9%	-12.5%	stable	stable	1 million
European starling	-0.9%	-0.2%	-0.9%	-0.6%	-0.9%	stable	decreasing	98 million

As presented in Table 2, the total number of blackbirds removed annually by the WS program is insignificant and is less than the population of a single large winter roost in Louisiana. Bird mortality estimates were derived using assessments of bait consumption and calculations described by Glahn and Avery (2001). Based on observations of WS personnel, the species composition of blackbirds at the time control operations were conducted was about 80% red-winged blackbirds, 18% brown-headed cowbirds, 1% great-tailed and boat-tailed grackles, 1% common grackles and a minimal number of Brewer's blackbirds, rusty blackbirds and European starlings.

Table 2. Total number of blackbirds killed by Louisiana WS program activities from 2002-2006.

Year	Number of blackbirds killed by WS (estimation)	Percentage of nationwide summer population	Percentage of annual nationwide natural mortality/winter population estimate	Number of sites treated with DRC-1339	Total pounds of DRC-1339 treated rice used
2002	2.2 million	0.22%	0.44%	62	220
2003	850,000	0.09%	0.17%	38	85
2004	780,000	0.08%	0.16%	50	78
2005	1.2 million	0.12%	0.24%	42	146
2006	1.0 million	0.1%	0.2%	30	120

WS lethal blackbird take from 2002-2006 in Louisiana fell within the range analyzed in the EA. The EA predicted that WS would kill no more than approximately 2.3 million blackbirds each year.

In addition to Louisiana, WS also conducted lethal blackbird damage management activities in the Central Bird Conservation Region (BCR) states of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Colorado, and Missouri during the reporting period. No blackbirds were reported killed by WS in North Dakota. Bird mortality estimates were derived using assessments of bait consumption and calculations described by Glahn and Avery (2001), field observations, National Wildlife Research Center research, and current CBC data. WS blackbird kill data for the Central

BCR from Fiscal Year 2001-2005 are presented in Tables 3 and 4. WS lethal take of red-winged blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds, and common grackles in Texas, Kansas, and North Dakota for Fiscal Years 2001-2005 (Table 5) fell within the range analyzed in the EA. The EA predicted that WS would kill up to 4.5 million red-winged blackbirds, 950,000 brown-headed cowbirds, and 670,000 common grackles each year in Texas, Kansas and North Dakota, combined.

Table 3. Total number of red-winged blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds, common grackles, great-tailed grackles, Brewer's blackbirds, boat-tailed grackles, and rusty blackbirds killed by WS program activities in the Central BCR States from Fiscal Year 2001-2005.

Fiscal Year	Red-winged Blackbird	Brown-headed Cowbirds	Common Grackles	Great-tailed Grackle	Brewer's Blackbird	Boat-tailed Grackle	Rusty Blackbird
2001	1.22 million 0.64%	326,000 0.36%	45,000 0.05%	46,300 8.85%	26,500 *0.27%	6,800 **	1,180 *0.12%
2002	2.23 million *1.2%	604,000 *0.67%	86,700 *0.09%	61,900 *12.4%	33,700 *0.34%	12,500 **	1,000 *0.1%
2003	2.23 million *1.2%	796,000 *0.88%	215,000 *0.22%	168,000 *29.6%	105,800 *1.06%	9,300 **	2,600 *0.26%
2004	864,200 *0.45%	244,300 *0.27%	57,300 *0.06%	79,000 *14.1%	17,200 *0.17%	5,800 **	400 *0.04%
2005	1.56 million *0.82%	444,200 *0.49%	133,500 *0.13%	149,900 *26.6%	73,600 *0.74%	9,500 **	2,400 0.24%

* Percentage of nationwide winter population estimate/annual natural mortality
** Percentage included with great-tailed grackle mortality

Table 4. Total number of blackbirds killed by WS program activities in the Central BCR States from Fiscal Year 2001-2005.

Fiscal Year	Number of blackbirds killed by WS (estimation)*	Percentage of nationwide summer population*	Percentage of annual nationwide natural mortality/winter population estimate*
2001	1.67 million	0.21%	0.42%
2002	3.03 million	0.38%	0.75%
2003	3.53 million	0.44%	0.88%
2004	1.27 million	0.16%	0.32%
2005	2.37 million	0.29%	0.59%

* Does not include European starlings

Table 4. Total number of red-winged blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds, and common grackles killed by WS program activities in Texas, Kansas, and North Dakota from Fiscal Year 2002-2006.

Fiscal Year	Red-winged Blackbird	Brown-headed Cowbirds	Common Grackles
2001	244,000	102,000	32,460

2002	465,000	192,000	65,000
2003	1.5 million	637,000	207,000
2004	239,800	98,100	31,300
2005	547,700	206,700	102,500

Program activities and their potential impact on target bird species have not changed from those analyzed in the EA. Based upon the density-dependent relationships in a blackbird population, WS program activities in Louisiana affecting less than 0.25% of the nationwide summer blackbird population and less than 0.50% of the annual natural mortality/winter population, and WS management activities in the Central BCR affecting less than 0.50% of the nationwide summer blackbird population and less than 1.0% of the annual natural mortality/winter population, WS management actions will have no adverse affect on state, regional or continental blackbird populations. The effects of WS activities on blackbird populations are expected to remain insignificant.

Effects on Other Wildlife Species, including T&E Species: The EA concluded that no adverse effects on other wildlife species (nontarget), including T&E species, would result from WS blackbird damage management activities. Additionally, direct control operations that remove brown-headed cowbirds may benefit songbird populations by reduction of nest parasitism.

From 2002-2006, no nontarget wildlife species are known to have died as a result of WS blackbird management activities. WS take of nontarget species was within the estimated level of lethal take analyzed in the EA. A review of T&E species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/TESSWebpageUsaLists?state=LA) and Louisiana Natural Heritage Program showed that no additional listings of T&E species and species of special concern in southwestern Louisiana have occurred since the completion of the EA in 2001 and no additional methods have been added to the program. Thus, WS's determination of no adverse effect is still valid and appropriate for the proposed action.

From 2002-2006, based on estimated cowbird take of 400,000, 150,000, 140,000, 216,000, and 180,000 birds, respectively, each year and formulas provided by K. Ouchley (Nature Conservancy, pers. Comm., 2001), WS calculates that up to 10.9-21.7 million songbird nests may have been protected over this 5 year period as a result of brown-headed cowbird population reduction. Reduction in numbers of other blackbird species may have benefited nontarget bird species by reducing nest site competition.

Program activities and their potential impacts on other wildlife species, including T&E species have not changed from those analyzed in the EA. Impacts of the program on this issue are expected to remain insignificant.

Effects on Public Health and Safety: The EA concluded that the effects of the WS blackbird damage management program on this issue would be insignificant. WS implementation of program activities from 2002-2006 did not result in any adverse impacts to public health and safety. Program activities and methods and their potential impacts on public health and safety

have not changed from those analyzed in the EA. Impacts of the program on this issue are expected to remain insignificant.

Economics Impacts to Stakeholders: The EA concluded that an IWDM approach to blackbird damage management has the greatest potential of successfully reducing blackbird damage to sprouting rice. From 2002-2006, blackbird roosts were effectively dispersed before rice planting began by WS's staging-area baiting program. The damage to sprouting rice associated with roosting birds was therefore reduced. Although exact economic benefits are difficult to determine, past grower questionnaires suggest that annual cost savings in some areas may be as high as $4200 per farm and $2.8 million total within the geographic region covered by the EA. Similar economic benefits are expected to continue. Additional economic benefits to growers will continue to be derived from WS's Technical Assistance activities, including assistance in the establishment of blackbird harassment programs and recommendations for alteration of habitat and cultural practices.

Effects on Aesthetics: The EA concluded the effects on aesthetics would be variable depending on the stakeholders' values towards wildlife. Program activities and methods and their potential impacts on aesthetics have not changed from those analyzed in the EA. Impacts of the program on this issue are expected to remain insignificant.

Humaneness and Animal Welfare Concerns of Lethal Methods Used by WS: WS personnel are experienced and professional in their use of management methods, and methods are applied as humanely as possible. The EA concluded that the methods used by WS to manage blackbird damage are relatively humane, but that some persons will view some methods used as inhumane. Program activities and methods and their potential impacts on humanness and animal welfare concerns have not changed from those analyzed in the EA. Impacts of the program on this issue are expected to remain insignificant.

Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail were:

Population stabilization through birth control. Under this alternative, blackbird populations would be managed through the use of contraceptives. Blackbirds would be sterilized or contraceptives administered to limit their ability to produce offspring. However, at present, there are no chemical or biological contraceptive agents for blackbirds. Theoretically, a blackbird contraceptive or chemosterilant, if delivered to a sufficient number of individuals, could temporarily suppress local breeding populations by inhibiting reproduction. Reduction of local populations would result from natural mortality combined with reduced fecundity. No birds would be killed directly with this method, however, and these birds would continue to cause damage. Populations of dispersing birds would probably be unaffected. The use of contraceptives is not realistic, at this point, since there are no effective contraceptives or legal methods of delivering contraceptives to blackbirds.

Finding of No Significant Impact

The analysis in the EA and this Decision document indicates that there will not be a significant adverse impact, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of the human environment as a result of implementing the proposed action. I agree with this conclusion and therefore find that an EIS need not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Blackbird damage management as conducted by WS in Louisiana is not regional or national in scope.

2. The proposed action would pose minimal risk to public health and safety. Risks to the public from WS methods were determined to be low in a formal risk assessment (USDA 1997, Appendix P).

3. There are no unique characteristics such as park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic areas, or ecologically critical areas that would be significantly affected. Built-in mitigation measures that are part of WS's standard operating procedures and adherence to laws and regulations will further ensure that WS activities do not harm the environment.

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. Although there is some opposition to wildlife damage management, this action is not highly controversial in terms of size, nature, or effect.

5. Based on the analysis documented in the EA and the accompanying administrative file, the effects of the proposed damage management program on the human environment would not be significant. The effects of the proposed activities are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

6. The proposed action would not establish a precedent for any future action with significant effects.

7. No significant cumulative effects were identified through this assessment. The EA and this Decision document discussed cumulative effects of WS on target and non-target species populations and concluded that such impacts were not significant for this or other anticipated actions to be implemented or planned within the State.

8. The proposed activities would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would they likely cause any loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9. WS has determined that the proposed project would not adversely affect any Federal or Louisiana State listed threatened or endangered species.

10. The proposed action would be in compliance with all federal, state, and local laws.

Decision

I have carefully reviewed the EA, input resulting from the 2001 public involvement process, and this Decision/FONSI. I believe the issues identified in the EA would be best addressed through implementation of Alternative 1 (the Proposed Action). Alternative 1 is therefore selected because it offers the greatest flexibility in achieving effectiveness while minimizing cumulative adverse impacts on the quality of the human environment with respect to the issues raised for consideration in this process. The WS program will implement the proposed action in compliance with all applicable standard operating procedures in Chapter 3 of the EA. This Decision/FONSI will take effect 30 days after publication of a Legal Notice making the EA, the 2001 Decision/FONSI, and this Decision/FONSI available to the public for review and comment. New issues or alternatives raised after publication of public notices will be fully considered to determine whether the EA and its Decision should be revisited and, if appropriate, revised, or if a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS should be issued.

For additional information regarding this decision, please contact USDA/APHIS/WS, P.O. Box 589, Port Allen, Louisiana 70767.

9-21-06

David A. Nelson
APHIS-WS
Acting Eastern Region Director

Date

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