

Finding Of No Significant Impact
Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program Fence Deterrent in Kenedy County, Texas
Environmental Assessment
November 2025

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) analyzing the potential impacts on the human environment associated with modifying existing four-foot-high cattle fencing by adding an additional four-feet of fencing in order to raise the height to eight feet. Increasing the current 14-mile long cattle fence bordering the King Ranch Norias Division in southern Kenedy County, Texas, to the height of high game fencing would prevent or limit the spread of cattle fever ticks (CFTs) by restricting the movement of free-ranging wildlife hosts (such as white-tailed deer and nilgai). The EA, incorporated by reference in this document, is available from <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/cattle/ticks/cattle-fever> or from:

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

To compile, share, and review information for this EA, USDA APHIS consulted several individuals and other agencies, including State Historic Preservation Officer/Texas Historical Commission in Austin, Texas; Texas Animal Health Commission in Raymondville, Texas; and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Ecological Services, in Alamo, Texas.

BACKGROUND:

In 1906, USDA APHIS launched the cooperative Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program (CFTEP) to eliminate bovine babesiosis (or cattle fever) from U.S. cattle. By 1943, the United States was declared free of CFTs, except for the 500-mile-long permanent tick quarantine zone (PTQZ) in southern Texas. However, the program now faces renewed challenges from increased cross-border movement of CFT-infested livestock and growing populations of wildlife CFT hosts, like deer and nilgai. Despite ongoing eradication efforts (including surveillance, patrolling, treating infested animals, and vacating premises), the recent rise in CFT-infested properties outside the PTQZ suggests current strategies may be insufficient. The risk of babesiosis transmission remains high, particularly in certain areas like southern Kenedy County. To boost effectiveness of the CFTEP, USDA APHIS has funded the installation of high game fences in targeted areas. This fencing has limited the movement of wildlife hosts and reduced the reliance on chemical treatments, ultimately lowering production costs for livestock producers.

This EA evaluated two alternatives:

No Action Alternative: USDA APHIS would not fund the installation of high game fencing at the King Ranch Norias Division in southern Kenedy County, Texas. As a result, wildlife hosts of CFTs would continue to breach the existing four-foot-tall cattle fencing and potentially spread CFTs to livestock.

Proposed Action Alternative (preferred): USDA APHIS would fund the addition of four-foot-high fencing to the existing four-foot-high cattle fence along the southern fence/boundary line of the King Ranch Norias Division, creating a 14-mile long, eight-foot-tall high game fence. This measure would restrict the movement of deer and nilgai populations and the spread of CFTs, improving the effectiveness of the CFTEP.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

USDA APHIS evaluated the potential environmental consequences of the above-described alternatives focusing on both physical and biological environments, as well as on human health and socioeconomics. Based on the analysis in the EA, USDA APHIS has determined that the preferred alternative (funding the installation of fencing) is not expected to affect the quality of the human environment considering the following factors:

- Physical environment: Raising the height of existing fencing to that of high game fencing is not expected to substantially affect the quality of natural resources, including soil, water, and air.
- Biological environment: Potential effects to local vegetation and non-target animals are not expected either given the fencing design and method. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the preferred alternative may affect but is not likely to adversely affect threatened and endangered species and/or their designated or proposed critical habitats.
- Human health and socioeconomics: While CFTs pose no direct public health risk, unrestricted movement of wildlife hosts of CFTs (particularly white-tailed deer and nilgai) can have implications for the ranching community. The preferred alternative would decrease human exposure to various other harmful tick species that free-ranging wildlife may carry. Moreover, the high game fencing will not overlap any colonias as there are none in the proposed program area nor will the proposed action intersect any human communities or properties (neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, etc.). The risk of adverse effects on fencing workers is also unlikely as the program personnel always use appropriate protective equipment.
- Reasonably foreseeable effects: USDA APHIS works with other Federal agencies to minimize aggregate effects on the environment. For instance, potential effects of USDA

APHIS actions on natural resources are minimal because of the coordination among CFTEP (maintaining trails and surveying for cattle coming from Mexico), U.S. Department of Homeland Security (using sites associated with potential illegal border crossings), USFWS (wildlife monitoring on trails), and local agencies and landowners (managing lands and maintaining ranches).

- USDA APHIS complies with Executive Order 13045, “Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks,” by evaluating the potential risks and ensuring child safety in its proposed actions. There are no adverse impacts to children expected as a result of the proposed fence installation.

DETERMINATION:

I found that the implementation of the proposed action will not have a reasonably foreseeable significant effect on the quality of the human environment. I have considered and based my finding of no significant impact on the analysis contained within the EA. Because I have not found evidence of significant environmental impacts associated with the proposed action, I find that an environmental impact statement does not need to be prepared and that the program may proceed with the action immediately following the posting of this decision document.

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Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

November 19, 2025

Date