

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Reestablishment of Sonoran Pronghorn

Proposed Action

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared a final Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzes potential effects of a proposal to reestablish additional Sonoran pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana sonoriensis*) populations within its historic range in southern Arizona. The purpose of the proposed action is to contribute to the recovery of endangered Sonoran pronghorn by establishing additional populations. Establishing a second population of Sonoran pronghorn is a recovery action that contributes to the downlisting criterion of having an estimated 300 adults in one United States (U.S.) population and establishing a second U.S. population.

The proposed action consists of two components: 1) construction and operation of a captive-breeding pen at Kofa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Yuma County; and 2) relocation of some Sonoran pronghorn from the existing captive-breeding pen at Cabeza Prieta NWR to the eastern part of the Barry M. Goldwater Range - East (BMGR-East) in Maricopa County. All Sonoran pronghorn would be reintroduced under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

Alternatives Considered

The Service has analyzed two other alternatives to the proposed action in the EA:

Alternative 1: No Action

The no action alternative maintains the current Sonoran pronghorn program in the U.S. Operation of the existing captive-breeding pen at Cabeza Prieta NWR, implementing seasonal closures, and releasing animals into the current U.S. range would continue. Also, BMGR-East would continue Sonoran pronghorn monitoring and implementing protection measures for Sonoran pronghorn.

Alternative 2: Captive-Breeding Pen at BMGR-East

This alternative would involve reestablishment of Sonoran pronghorn through construction and operation of a captive-breeding pen at BMGR-East to establish a second population of Sonoran pronghorn. The captive-breeding pen would be constructed at the same location as the holding pen at BMGR-East that is described for the proposed action.

Decision and Rationale

The proposed action was selected over the two other alternatives because it includes the largest area (7,405 square miles (sq. mi)) of potential habitat for Sonoran pronghorn of any of the alternatives. The other alternatives would include only 3,999 (alternative 2) and 2,437 sq. mi (alternative 1) of potential habitat for Sonoran pronghorn.

The proposed action will contribute to meeting all downlisting criteria, as would Alternative 2. Of the three alternatives considered, the proposed action has the highest potential for successful establishment of

a second population of Sonoran pronghorn, considering current land uses, human disturbance, disease, predation, precipitation characteristics, forage quality, and water sources. It is the only alternative with the potential for establishment of a third population within historic range.

Effects of the Selected Alternative

The effects of the proposed action, described in the final EA, will be long-term but minor and of low intensity.

- The potential impacts will be both beneficial and adverse, but minor. Designation of reestablished populations as nonessential experimental under section 10(j) of the ESA will relax the prohibition of take under section 9 of the ESA for lawful activities within the designated area, as described in the final EA.
- There will be no effects to public health or safety from proposed reestablishment of populations of Sonoran pronghorn within its historic range, and the proposed action will not affect unique characteristics of the geographic area.
- Proposed reestablishment of populations of Sonoran pronghorn within its historic range does not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects and will not result in significant cumulative impacts.
- Proposed reestablishment of populations of Sonoran pronghorn within its historic range will have a beneficial effect on Sonoran pronghorn and contribute substantially toward meeting downlisting criteria.
- Significant cultural, historical, or scientific resources will not be affected by proposed reestablishment of populations of Sonoran pronghorn within its historic range. No cultural resources will be affected, as concurred by the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office and interested tribes.
- Proposed reestablishment of populations of Sonoran pronghorn within its historic range will not violate any federal, state, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The proposed action is not expected to have any significant adverse effects on wetlands and floodplains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988 because no ground-disturbing activities are proposed in wetlands and floodplain areas will not be modified.

The proposed action is not expected to have any significant effects on the human environment because it will have no effect on community services or community cohesion. No measurable detrimental effects are anticipated in regards to communities or individuals, and there will be no disproportionate adverse effects on low-income or minority populations. There will be no change to public access to the areas where Sonoran pronghorn will be reestablished.

Public Involvement and Coordination

The proposed action has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. Sixteen federal, state, and tribal government agency representatives participated in an interagency scoping meeting held in June 2008.

Public scoping for the Sonoran pronghorn reestablishment project, conducted in the fall of 2008, included a scoping letter sent to approximately 6,000 persons and organizations and a series of three open houses held in the Arizona cities of Yuma, Tucson, and Phoenix. Potentially-interested and/or affected persons,

groups, and organizations were identified and compiled into a project mailing list consisting of 949 names.

Written public scoping comments regarding the initially-proposed actions included 44 written responses. Comments were used by the Service to identify significant issues from which the proposed action and alternatives were refined and mitigation measures to avoid or reduce potential project effects were identified.

The draft EA was made available for public review and comment for a 60-day period which began on February 5, 2010. Twenty individuals or groups provided comments on the EA. A second comment period was held from June 9 to July 9, 2010, for the purpose of providing a peer review of the proposed 10j rule and EA. Public comment was also accepted during that period. Public comments and questions are summarized in a chart contained in the EA Appendix, which also includes responses to comments on the 10j rule. The final EA was prepared to reflect responses to comments.

Decision

Therefore, it is my determination that the proposed action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required. An environmental assessment has been prepared in support of this finding and is available upon request from Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, 1611 N. Second Ave., Ajo, AZ 85321, (520) 387-6483. The EA is also available on-line at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/arizona/cabeza/>

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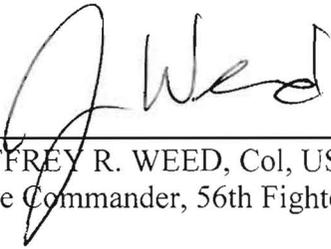
Regional Director

Fay E. Nicholopoulou

Date

4/19/11

Having independently evaluated and approved the scope and content of the October, 2010 Environmental Assessment for Reestablishment of Sonoran Pronghorn, prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and hereby incorporated by reference, I conclude the proposed action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. This finding is limited to establishing a holding pen on Barry M. Goldwater Range-East for the nonessential and experimental population of Sonoran Pronghorn relocated from the existing captive-breeding pen at Cabeza Prieta NWR under Section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act. Accordingly, no further environmental impact analysis will be required for this component of the Proposed Action. This determination is made expressly in conjunction with the foregoing Finding of No Significant Impact by the Regional Director and through the adoption of the aforementioned assessment. The proposed action will not reduce the military training capabilities of the Barry M. Goldwater Range-East and is consistent with the March 2007 Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan for BMGR-East.



JEFFREY R. WEED, Col, USAF
Vice Commander, 56th Fighter Wing

13 May 11

Date

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and determined that the action of establishing a nonessential experimental population of Sonoran pronghorn in southwestern Arizona pursuant to section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended:

Check One:

is a Categorical Exclusion (CatEx) as provided by 516 DM 2, Appendix 1, and/or 516 DM 6, Appendix 1 (*reference which CatEx was used for this determination*). No further NEPA documentation will therefore be made.

is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact.

is found to have significant effects and, therefore, further consideration of this action will require a Notice of Intent to be published in the Federal register announcing the decision to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

is not approved because of unacceptable environmental damage, or violation of Fish and Wildlife Service mandates, policies, regulations, or procedures.

is an emergency action within the context of 40 CFR 1506.11. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Signature Approval

Susan Jacobson
(1) Chief, Endangered Species

4.18.11
Date

Ann Baker
(2) Assistant Regional Director -
for Ecological Services

4-19-2011
Date

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Regional Director

4/19/11
Date