

U.S. Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Region 1- California/Nevada Operations Office

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge
Proposed Ma-le'l Dunes Restoration

The Ma-le'l Dunes are a 160-acre area of coastal dune and estuary located adjacent to the Lanphere Dunes Unit of Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). Currently under ownership of the Center for Natural Lands Management, the property is in the process of being transferred to the Service for inclusion in the Refuge as the Ma-le'l Dunes Unit. Pending transfer, the Service has a Cooperative Land Management Agreement (No. 11593-3-J001) with CNLM to allow for restoration activities to be undertaken by the Service. The California Department of Corrections has proposed to fund the restoration of dune habitats (primarily through removal of invasive plant species) on the site pursuant to CDC's Statewide Electrical Fence Project Habitat Conservation Plan. Consequently, the Ma-le'l Dunes Restoration Plan was prepared, and a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), Biological Assessment, and Biological Opinion were prepared under the auspices of the Service. These documents are available to review by contacting the Refuge at 6800 Lanphere Rd., Arcata, CA 95521 or calling (707) 822-6378.

The Draft EA analyzed the Proposed Action and a No Action alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, the site would continue to degrade due to the spread of invasive plants. Endangered plants present on the site would eventually be extirpated due to the loss of their habitat. Under the Proposed Alternative invasive species would be manually removed from 33 acres of dunes within a 129-acre area, restoring native dune habitats including those supporting endangered plants. Manual vegetation removal includes 12.7 acres of European beachgrass, 10 acres of yellow bush lupine/jubata grass, 6 acres of iceplant, and 2 acres of English ivy. Revegetation of 3 acres of degraded forest will also occur. Glyphosate herbicide will be used on less than 1 acre of poison oak to allow for subsequent manual removal of English ivy.

The Proposed Alternative was selected over the No Action Alternative because of the clear benefit to endangered plants and rare coastal dune habitats. Implementation of the agency's decision would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects: 1) Beneficial effects on physical processes including those that shape nearshore dunes, through the removal of vegetation that disrupts these processes, 2) Beneficial effects on biological resources, including gains toward recovery goals of endangered plants, through the restoration of their habitat, although in the short term minimal, incidental take of endangered beach layia and Humboldt Bay wallflower may occur. The Biological Opinion concluded that these losses were not likely to jeopardize these species. In addition, the Biological Opinion concurred with the Refuge's determination that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect the threatened Western Snowy Plover; 2) No effect on cultural resources; 3) No effect on recreation and public access, and 4) No effect to slight beneficial effect on social economic issues

through contributions to the local restoration economy and benefits to the community investment in natural lands.

Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the proposal as described below, and include measures developed through Section 7 consultation with the Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office:

- Known cultural resource sites will be avoided. During any ground-disturbing activities in areas where potential new sites could occur, a cultural monitor from the Wiyot Tribe will be present if the tribe deems it appropriate. In the event that a new cultural site is encountered, work would be stopped in the immediate vicinity until a qualified archeologist can review the find and determine the appropriate course of action.
- All activities in and adjacent to mapped endangered plant populations will be carried out under direct supervision of the Restoration Manager.
- Areas subject to disturbance during implementation of the restoration plan will be surveyed by the Restoration Manager, and any endangered plant populations will be flagged before commencement of restoration work.
- Any digging in areas occupied by endangered plants will be directly overseen by the Restoration Manager to avoid the disturbance or removal of endangered plant species.
- Work crews will be trained to avoid endangered plants.
- Piles of removed plants will be placed outside of all the flagged endangered plant areas.
- Grass-flaming and duff-removal methods will not be utilized in areas occupied by endangered plants.
- Removal of yellow bush lupine in endangered plant areas will take place following seed dispersal for beach layia (after June 30). However, if mature lupine pods are present in these areas, the Restoration Manager will carefully remove them before dispersal.
- Any adversely affected wallflower individual will be documented by the Restoration Manager.
- Any jubata grass found in endangered plant areas will be removed by the Restoration Manager, after the beach layia seed set.
- Routes to the removal areas will be established to avoid endangered plant areas and will be clearly marked.

The proposal is not expected to have any significant adverse affects on wetlands and floodplains, pursuant to Executive Orders 11990 and 11988, as the only action to be taken in wetlands is the removal of non-native vegetation in seasonal dune swales.

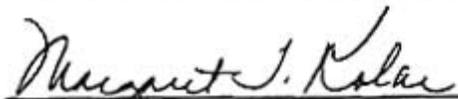
The proposal is not expected to have any significant effects on the human environment because it does not result in any changes to land use, including public access and recreation. A slight beneficial effect on social economic issues is expected to result from contributions to the local restoration economy and benefits to the community investment in natural lands.

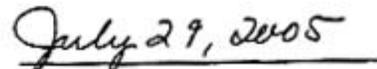
The proposal has been thoroughly coordinated with all interested and/or affected parties. The Draft EA was made available for public review and public comment starting May 11, 2005. The Refuge did not receive any public comments on the proposed project. Notice of the Finding of No Significant Impact will be posted on the Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office Website <http://arcata.fws.gov>. Members of the Dunes Forum will be notified through e-mail of its availability on the website and upon request from the Refuge.

Parties contacted during the planning process and preparation of the EA includes:

- Humboldt County Department of Planning.
- Friends of the Dunes
- Table Bluff Reservation, Wiyot Tribe
- Redwood Gun Club
- Sierra Pacific
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- California Department of Parks and Recreation
- California Coastal Conservancy
- Humboldt Coastal Coalition
- North Coast Chapter California Native Plant Society
- Redwood Region Audubon Society
- Sierra Club
- Humboldt County Department of Public Works
- Center for Natural Lands Management

Based on my review and evaluation of the attached EA and other supporting documentation, I have determined that the proposed Ma-le'l Dunes restoration project 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 the Service identified above.


Assistant Manager - Refuges
California/Nevada Operations Office


Date