

## **Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**

### *Adoption of the April 2012 U.S. Geological Survey Environmental Assessment: Field Studies to Address the Safety of Sylvatic Plague Vaccine in Prairie Dogs and Non-target Animals*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared this document in accordance with the procedures for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act as it applies to the Federal Aid in Fish and Wildlife Restoration Acts (64 Stat. 430; 16 U.S.C. Sec. 777 et. seq. and 50 Stat. 916; 16 U.S.C. Sec. 669 et. seq.).

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) has submitted a grant application entitled *Sylvatic Plague Management in Prairie Dogs and Black-footed Ferrets*, to the Service's Region 6 Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) for review and approval. The grant proposal was selected for funding during the competitive process of the State Wildlife Grant Program in May 2015. WAFWA has submitted the grant application to WSFR to obligate the awarded grant funds. After obligation, WAFWA will subgrant awarded funds to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to carry out the proposed project. Specifically, the USGS Wildlife Health Center proposes to conduct field studies to assess the safety of an oral sylvatic plague vaccine which is designed to prevent the outbreak of plague in prairie dogs.

The Service's approval of the WAFWA grant application constitutes a Federal action subject to the requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA). As noted above, the USGS will receive awarded funds (as a subgrant) to carry out the project and, in anticipation of this, completed an EA to meet NEPA requirements. Therefore, the Service is adopting the USGS EA to meet the NEPA compliance requirement for the grant and to reduce duplication and paperwork.

The EA proposes to test the plague vaccine at two restricted sites of prairie dog colonies in Colorado (Phase I). The USGS Decision Record dated May 17, 2012, supports the proposed work. Phase II will take place in Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Montana, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming and a subsequent USGS FONSI was issued on May 9, 2013 to include the work at the Phase II study sites.

A range of reasonable alternatives was considered; each alternative is summarized in Section 4 of the EA. Section 3.2 provides a summary of public involvement and Appendices A and B describe public and agency participation and coordination with other Federal and State agencies. Two open houses were held on February 15 and 16, 2012 in which 20 people total attended. Comments were recorded, and no significant concerns or issues were raised.

Since the proposed project takes place over seven states in the western United States, the USGS entered into formal Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation with the Service's Ecological Services Office located at the Regional Office in Denver. This consultation resulted in a letter from Michael Thabault, Assistant Regional Director, on May 7, 2013 concurring with the USGS

assessment of a potential impact to nine listed or candidate species and approval of the proposed mitigation strategies for the listed or candidate species.

Based on review of the final USGS EA, I have determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action which would significantly impact the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. I also find that all reasonable alternatives were considered in the evaluation of this project, and that this project complies with the intent of Executive Order 11988 "Floodplain Management" and Executive Order 11990 "Protection of Wetlands." Consequently, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The EA is on file in the Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 134 Union Boulevard, Lakewood, Colorado, 80228, and is available upon request. It is also available online at <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/wsfr/nepa.php>.

APPROVAL:

*Deputy*  


Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6

*1-11-16*

Date

References:

Carl, Leon. Adoption of Environmental Assessment and Issuance of Finding of No Significant Impact. May 9, 2013.

Final Environmental Assessment, Field Studies to Assess the Safety of Sylvatic Plague Vaccine in Prairie Dogs and Non-target Animals. United States Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center. April 2012.

Thabault, Michael. Letter to Eva Bryson. May 7, 2013.

Werkheiser, William. Decision Record. May 17, 2012.