

Finding of No Significant Impact
Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge Feasibility Study
and Environmental Assessment
Monroe County, Pennsylvania

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has proposed to establish the 20,466-acre Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Monroe County, Pennsylvania to protect ecologically unique habitats. The valley currently supports, or has supported in the past, several nationally-rare ecosystems, five federally-listed threatened or endangered species, many migratory birds, and over 30 plant and animal species listed as threatened or endangered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It is recognized as one of the most unique and important areas for the federally-listed bog turtle (threatened), migrating raptors, and inter-montane wetlands. This final Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to describe and evaluate the biological, environmental and socioeconomic effects of the proposed refuge.

Three alternatives, including a "No Action" alternative were developed and evaluated in this EA.

In Alternative A, there would be no new refuge and no designated acquisition boundary. Habitat protection and management would continue to be done by existing organizations and government programs. There would be no new opportunities for refuge-based wildlife-dependent public uses. This alternative would potentially subject the wildlife habitats of Cherry Valley to further development and could very well result in the loss of these Federal trust resources.

The Service's preferred action is Alternative B. When fully implemented, it will provide long-term protection to the 20,466 acres of the Cherry Creek and its riparian habitat, mature forest and forested ridges, forested wetland, emergent and scrub-shrub wetlands, and agricultural land consisting primarily of old fields, hay meadows, pasturelands, and croplands. The diverse habitats within the proposed refuge support numerous wildlife species, including neotropical migrant landbirds, waterfowl, fish, amphibians, mammals, and threatened or endangered animal and plant species. The refuge will also provide extensive opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, new and dynamic partnerships, and scientific research.

Alternative C would provide important protections and management opportunities for wildlife and habitats in the valley, especially for wetlands and ridge forests. However, compared to Alternative B, benefits for riparian and stream species (e.g. brook trout) and species associated with forested wetland ecosystems would be considerably less. Unlike Alternative A, it would offer substantial opportunities for compatible public uses, along with new refuge-based partnerships and scientific research; however, these opportunities would be substantially less than with the preferred action (Alternative B).

Based on a review and evaluation of the information contained in the supporting documents, including the final EA, Land Protection Plan, Realty Feasibility Study, and Conceptual Management Plan, I have determined that the preferred action, Alternative B, is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The proposal

is part of a cooperative effort to preserve important natural resources and uses. The overall positive benefits to be derived from the protection of these lands will enhance the quality of the environment for local residents and the general public alike.

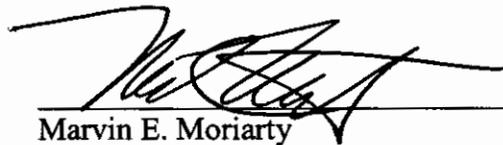
Based on the following summary of effects (as discussed in detail in the EA), I have determined that Alternative B, which I have selected, will not have a significant impact on the human environment. For this reason, I have determined that no environmental impact statement needs to be prepared.

1. The preferred action will not adversely impact the area's environmental quality, air quality, and water quality and supply. The proposed refuge is likely to improve these factors.
2. The preferred action will provide positive effects compared to Alternative A since creation of a Cherry Valley NWR would reduce the potential for large-scale development and related human disturbance on these lands and reduce the long-term potential for the resulting soil impacts.
3. The preferred action will enable the protection of over 1,400 wetland acres, 12,900 upland forest acres, and 3,400 acres of agricultural land and grasslands. This will have a major positive effect on habitats and ecosystems.
4. Protection of these lands and habitats for migratory birds will have direct, immediate, and long-term positive effects on resident, breeding, migratory, and wintering species of migratory birds and game birds.
5. Protection of these lands and habitats for threatened and endangered species, as with migratory birds, will have direct, immediate, and long-term positive effects on the bog turtle, and will offer immediate opportunities to assist in the recovery of the Indiana bat, and the dwarf wedgemussel.
6. The preferred action will have essential, positive effects on interjurisdictional fish and aquatic organisms because it will provide additional and necessary protection measures for valuable stream and riparian habitats.
7. The preferred action will have positive, long-lasting effects on other wildlife, and it will provide additional protection measures for all of the diverse habitats needed by these species.
8. The preferred alternative will have positive long-lasting effects on native and rare plants in the valley, and will provide protection measures for all of the diverse habitats needed by these plant species.
9. Economic impacts are difficult to determine. The fiscal impact to Monroe County and its townships would depend on both the quantity of land acquired and the rate of acquisition.

Economic gains from wildlife-oriented recreation may be expected by local merchants in the valley.

10. The preferred alternative will benefit cultural resources by ensuring that none of the substantial impacts related to development for residential or commercial uses will affect known or undiscovered cultural and historic resources on those lands.
11. Acquisition of lands, either in fee title or conservation easements, will be on a willing seller basis. Willing sellers will be compensated for their lands based on the appraised fair market value. Landowners choosing not to sell will retain all the rights, privileges, and obligations of land ownership.
12. County or tax revenues lost due to a change from private ownership to public will be somewhat offset by annual payments paid to the county/town through the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act.
13. This proposal does not represent any change in Service policy nor does it establish any precedent-setting actions that may have significant adverse environmental impacts of long-term implication.

Implementation of this decision can occur with the Director's approval of the Land Protection Plan, as soon as the public is notified.



Marvin E. Moriarty
Regional Director

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