United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Reducing the Effects of Predation on Threatened and Endangered Birds
in the State of Maine

Background

The Maine Division of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) proposes to support the reduction and prevention of predation on ground nesting threatened and endangered (T&E) birds. Piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*), roseate terns (*Sterna dougallii*), and least terns (*Sternula antillarum*) nesting in Maine's coastal areas are known to be affected by the following species: red fox *(Vulpes vulpes),* gray fox *(Urocyon cinereoargenteus),* coyotes *(Canis latrans),* raccoons *(Procyon lotor),* Virginia opossum *(Didelphis virginiana),* striped skunks *(Mephitis mephitis),* mink *(Mustela vison),* long-tailed weasels *(Mustela frenata),* short-tailed weasels *(Mustela erminea),* feral and domestic cats *(Felis* spp.), feral and domestic dogs *(Canis* spp.), eastern chipmunks *(Tamias striatus),* ring-billed gulls *(Larus delawarensis),* herring gulls *(Larus argentatus),* great black-backed gulls *(Larus marinus),* laughing gulls *(Larus atricilla),* American crows *(Corvus brachyrhynchos),* American kestrels *(Falco parveriusi),* merlins *(Falco columbarius),* and great horned owls *(Bubo virginianus).* Currently, these predator species are managed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) program by request of property owners. MDIFW proposes to use Federal funds in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the Endangered Species Act and the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act to support this program.

The USDA WS program, in cooperation with the USFWS, prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the potential environmental and social impacts to the quality of the human environment from reducing the effects of predation on threatened and endangered birds in Maine (USDA 2012). The EA evaluated the need to manage predation risks associated with nest predators, the potential issues associated with managing predation or threats of predation on nesting bird populations, and the environmental consequences of conducting different alternatives to meet the need for action and to address the identified issues.

Proposed Actions and Alternatives Considered

In the EA, the following four alternatives were examined: (1) no involvement by WS in managing predation risks; (2) managing nest predation risks by WS through technical assistance only; (3) continuing the current integrated approach to managing nest predation (the proposed action/no action); and (4) managing nest predation using non-lethal methods only. Under the proposed action, current implementation of an adaptive integrated approach utilizing non-lethal and lethal techniques would continue, as deemed appropriate using the WS Decision Model, to reduce nest predation caused by avian and mammalian predators. To meet this goal, WS would

continue to respond to requests for assistance with, at a minimum, technical assistance, or when funding was available, operational damage management. Funding could occur through federal appropriations or from cooperative funding.

All methods including habitat management, non-lethal and lethal mechanical management, and non-lethal and lethal chemical management methods are addressed in Appendix B of the EA and would be available for use by WS to resolve requests for assistance to manage nest predation in the State. Non-lethal methods would be given first consideration in the formulation of each damage management strategy, and would be recommended or implemented when practical and effective before recommending or implementing lethal methods. Using the WS Decision model discussed in the EA, WS would employ methods singularly or in combination in an integrated approach to alleviate risks of nest predation.

The cumulative levels of take of nest predators, based on the levels that have occurred previously by WS and others, and anticipating the levels addressed in the EA, are of low magnitude when compared to the qualitative and quantitative parameters addressed in the EA. The permitting of take by the MDIFW and the USFWS ensures that cumulative take levels occur within allowable levels to maintain species' populations and meet population objectives for each species. WS has established the maximum number of individuals of each nest predator that could be taken through analysis of potential impacts to each of the target species populations. Anticipated take by WS for these target species are: 30 red fox *(Vulpes vulpes),* 20 gray fox *(Urocyon cinereoargenteus),* 20 coyotes *(Canis latrans),* 150 raccoons *(Procyon lotor),* 50 Virginia opossum *(Didelphis virginiana),* 50 striped skunks *(Mephitis mephitis),* 20 mink *(Mustela vison),*10 long- tailed weasels *(Mustela frenata),* 10 short-tailed weasels *(Mustela erminea),* 20 feral and domestic cats *(Felis* spp.), 5 feral and domestic dogs *(Canis* spp.), 75 eastern chipmunks *(Tamias striatus),* 50 ring-billed gulls *(Larus delawarensis),* 50 herring gulls *(Larus argentatus),* 100 great black-backed gulls *(Larus marinus),* 700 laughing gulls *(Larus atricilla),* 200 American crows *(Corvus brachyrhynchos),* 5 American kestrels *(Falco parveriusi,* 5 merlins *(Falco columbarius),* and 5 great horned owls *(Bubo virginianus).*

The effects of each of the alternatives on the following nine issues were analyzed in detail: effects of activities on target wildlife populations; effects of activities on the populations of non-target wildlife; effects of activities on threatened and endangered species; effectiveness of methods and strategies for alleviating nest predation risks; effects of management methods on human health and safety; effects on the socio-cultural elements of the human environment; humaneness and animal welfare concerns regarding methods; effects of nest predator management activities on the regulated harvest of those species; and effects on recreation in areas where nest predation management activities occur. Eighteen additional issues were considered but not analyzed in detail. The environmental assessment will remain valid until WS and the cooperating agencies determine that new needs for action, changed conditions, or new alternatives having different environmental impacts must be analyzed.

Determination

I have determined that the environmental assessment meets the purpose and need of the USFWS. I find that all reasonable alternatives were considered in the evaluation of this project. Study of the effects of the proposed action on the issues considered has shown that the proposed action

will not have a negative impact on the quality of the human environment. Comments received by the public in response to the draft EA were addressed in WS' Finding of No Significant Impact (2013). Based on a review and evaluation of the EA and the supporting references cited below, I have determined that the population control of predators funded in part under grants ME E-1 Endangered Species, ME T-6 Fish and Wildlife Conservation Implementation, and ME W-87 Wildlife Assessment and Management is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The environmental assessment prepared by WS has been adopted by the USFWS according to the rules contained in 40 CFR 1506.3. Accordingly, preparation of an environmental impact statement on the proposed action is not required.

Chief, Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration

November 7 2013

Date

References:

http://www.maine.gov/ifw/pdfs/species_planning/birds/pipingplover/management2007.pdf

United States Department of Agriculture. 2012. Reducing the Effects of Predation on Threatened and Endangered Birds in the State of Maine. Environmental Assessment. Augusta, Maine.

United States Department of Agriculture. 2013. Reducing the Effects of Predation on Threatened and Endangered Birds in the State of Maine. Decision. Augusta, Maine.