

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**SMALL SCALE EXOTIC SPECIES REMOVAL
IN THE SAN RAFAEL VALLEY, ARIZONA**

We prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA - attached) for our involvement in efforts to remove exotic fishes and bullfrogs from four livestock tanks in the San Rafael Valley, Santa Cruz County, Arizona.

Proposed Action

The proposed action would implement a joint Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)/Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) proposal to control exotic species that was funded by the FWS's Collaborative Conservation Grant Program. The purpose of the proposal is to improve the status of the endangered Sonora tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum stebbinsi*), consistent with recommendations in that species' recovery plan, as well as provide potential recovery or conservation opportunities for a number of other listed and special status species. To summarize, FWS/AGFD's proposal (Appendix 1 of the EA) calls for a cooperative effort among the participants to: 1) Remove exotic species from selected stock tanks, 2) monitor and adaptively manage as needed to ensure native species survival, and 3) continue coordination among participants to ensure issues and concerns are addressed appropriately. These three primary elements of the plan include a number of conservation measures to minimize adverse environmental impacts. The project is a collaborative effort; three of the four tanks occur on Coronado National Forest lands, the fourth is on a private ranch owned by Ross Humphreys (San Rafael Ranch); Arizona State Parks will provide lodging for field workers.

Alternatives Considered

1. No Action Alternative. No action would be taken by the Fish and Wildlife Service to control exotic fishes or bullfrogs in the San Rafael Valley.
2. Alternative 1. In this alternative, mechanical treatments, including seining, gill netting, gigging, and electrofishing, as well as draining or partial draining of stock tanks, would be employed. As in the Preferred Alternative, we would salvage and hold salamanders during mechanical treatments likely to cause injury or mortality. Salamanders would be repatriated after completion of exotic species control.
3. Preferred Alternative. Under this alternative, FWS and its partners would use a variety of mechanical and chemical treatments to remove exotic species. Mechanical treatments described in Alternative 1, but also rotenone treatments, would be used to remove exotics. Sonora tiger salamanders occur in one or more of the tanks, thus to minimize

mortality of this endangered species, we would seine and salvage from the tanks as many salamanders as we can, and hold them in aquaria or other facilities. After treatments likely to cause injury or mortality are completed, we would repatriate the salamanders. During rotenone treatments, we would look for affected salamanders, salvage them, and revive them if possible.

The preferred alternative is most likely to succeed in controlling exotics because it includes both mechanical and chemical control options. Mechanical control can be effective, but to ensure all exotics have been removed, partial or ideally, complete draining of the tanks is desirable. However, water is needed for the endangered Sonora tiger salamander and for cattle that use these tanks as part of active grazing programs at all four tanks. Replacing the water is expected to be expensive and time consuming; hence, chemical control, which does not rely on low water levels, combined with mechanical controls, is likely to be more effective with fewer complications for grazing operations and endangered species.

Public Comment

This document was made available for public review from April 17 to May 17, 2006. It was mailed to 32 individuals, agencies, organizations, and libraries that were likely to be interested and potentially affected by the proposed action. A news release was mailed to news outlets in southern Arizona. The news release and the draft EA were also posted on our website (<http://www.fws.gov/arizonaes/>) where we requested comments.

We received one letter commenting on the draft EA. We addressed comments in this letter in the final EA, in which we have listed and responded to all issues, concerns, and questions described in the letter. The comments did not identify any significant new environmental impacts not addressed in the draft EA; however, the letter provided valuable information that improved the final EA and details of implementing the proposed action. The Coronado National Forest also solicited input on a draft EA prepared to address their involvement in the project. They received no comments on that draft.

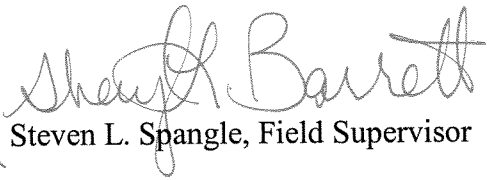
This FONSI with its attached EA will be available on our website, and all who received notice or commented on the draft EA will receive notice of this decision and where it can be accessed.

Determination

Based upon information contained in the final EA and supporting data in our files, we have determined that this action is not a major Federal action that 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. Specifically, although effects to an endangered species, recreation, water quality, water quantity, and livestock operations are identified in the EA, these effects are minor and substantial conservation measures, which we are committed to implement, are built into the proposed action that will minimize or eliminate adverse effects. Net effects to the affected endangered species are anticipated to be very positive. This action is not an action that normally requires preparation of an EIS, and is not similar to such actions. Accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed action is not warranted.

The preferred alternative provides greater flexibility in regard to control methods, and thus is more likely to be successful, as compared to alternative 1. In addition, the preferred alternative does not rely on draining or partial draining of tanks to be effective.

As a result, it is my decision to proceed with the preferred alternative for small-scale exotic species removal in the San Rafael Valley, as described in the attached EA.

SEN 
Steven L. Spangle, Field Supervisor

6/20/2006
Date