

**U.S. Department of Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Region 1, Portland, Oregon**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Willapa National Wildlife Refuge
Tarlatt Slough WSDOT Tidal Restoration
Pacific County, Washington**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared the Tarlatt Slough WSDOT Tidal Restoration, Pacific County, Washington Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed tidal restoration work on Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) land adjacent to the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), Pacific County Washington.

The purpose of this project is to fully restore natural tidal processes and rehabilitate 48.58 acres of the Tarlatt Slough WSDOT site to historic estuarine wetland conditions for use as mitigation for WSDOT highway improvement projects within the Willapa Bay Watershed (WRIA 24). Removal of the perimeter berm, re-establishment of the historic tidal channel network, and planned connections to existing tidal channels at the edges of the site will restore hydrologic and ecological processes to the currently degraded area.

After the Service conducts the restoration work on the Tarlatt Slough property, WSDOT intends to donate the fee title of the Tarlatt Slough property (49.26 acres) and the Parpala Slough property (34.65 acres) to the Service. Seventy six of the eighty three acres are within the approved refuge boundary and on March 26, 2012, the Regional Director approved the 7-acre boundary expansion of the refuge to include all of Parpala Slough.

The Service will maintain the ecological functions and values of Tarlatt Slough as a wetland and WSDOT will receive mitigation credits for WSDOT bridge and road projects in the Willapa Bay area. The Service will maintain Parpala Slough as a forested wetland and reserve WSDOT's right to use Parpala Slough for mitigation credits.

Decision: Following comprehensive review and analysis, the Service selected Alternative B, the proposed action, for implementation because it is the alternative that best meets the following criteria:

- Achieves the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.
- Achieves the purposes of the Refuge.
- Will be able to achieve the Service's vision and goals for the Refuge.
- Maintains and restores the ecological integrity of the habitats and populations on the Refuge.
- Addresses the legal mandates of the Service and the Refuge.
- Is consistent with the scientific principles of sound fish and wildlife management and endangered species recovery.

Alternatives Considered: The EA describes the purpose and need for the proposed action, the affected environment, and the anticipated effects of two alternatives: Alternative A: No Action; and the proposed action, Alternative B: Tarlatt Slough WSDOT Tidal Restoration.

Under Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, the Service would not conduct habitat restoration on the WSDOT parcel adjacent to Refuge and the parcel would not eventually be transferred to the Refuge. Tarlatt Slough would remain diked pastureland and no hydrologic or ecological processes would be restored to the currently degraded area. WSDOT would also not transfer the Parpala Slough parcel to the Service. However, since WSDOT had identified the area as a mitigation site they would most likely work with another agency or contract with a private company to conduct the habitat restoration work. Effects could be similar as described in Alternative B, except WSDOT would not transfer the Tarlatt or Parpala Slough parcels to the Service.

Under Alternative B: Tarlatt Slough WSDOT Tidal Restoration, the selected alternative, the Service will restore 48.58 acres of historically diked tidal marsh at the southernmost end of Willapa Bay. The project will restore 48.58 acres wetland by:

- Removing a perimeter berm that disconnects the site from tidal action.
- Filling two man-made east-west drainage ditches that were excavated in attempts to drain the site.
- Re-establishing the historic tidal channel network across the site.

After the Service conducts the restoration work on the Tarlatt Slough property, WSDOT intends to donate the fee title of the Tarlatt Slough property (49.26 acres) and the Parpala Slough property (34.65 acres) to the Service.

Effects of Implementation: As described in the EA, the Service has determined that no significant impacts are likely to result from the proposed action of implementing Alternative B for the following reasons.

- Complete removal of the perimeter berm will fully restore tidal influences to the site and re-establish estuarine wetland.
- Once restoration is completed Service acquisition and management of the Tarlatt Slough would allow the Service to protect habitat for migrating and wintering shorebirds and the Pacific Brant as well an important rearing area for anadromous fish including steelhead, coastal cutthroat trout, chum, coho, and Chinook salmon and many other aquatic species.
- There would be no significant negative affect to threatened or endangered species from the habitat restoration work.
- No significant effects to hydrology, water quality, soils, air and noise are expected to occur.
- No significant effects to cultural resources are expected to occur. The Service would evaluate Refuge activities with the potential to affect archaeological or cultural resources at the Tarlatt Slough tidal restoration site and adopt protection measures to ensure that

archaeological and cultural resources are not adversely affected.

- No significant effects to the demographic, economic, and social setting are expected to occur.

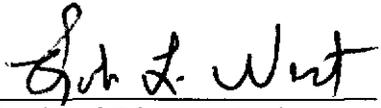
Service acquisition and restoration of the Tarlatt Slough would allow the Service to protect habitat for migrating and wintering shorebirds and the Pacific Brant as well as an important rearing area for anadromous fish including steelhead, coastal cutthroat trout, chum, coho, and Chinook salmon and many other aquatic species. Parpala Slough supports low elevation old growth conifer forest which is important for old growth dependent species including the spotted owl, marbled murrelet, bald eagle, Vaux's swift, pileated woodpecker, and bats.

As described in the EA and supporting documents, the proposed tidal restoration would have a long-term cumulative benefit for Refuge habitat protection and management. However, because this is a relatively small habitat restoration project, the benefits would not represent a significant impact on the human environment as defined in the National Environmental Policy Act's Implementing Regulations.

Public Availability: WSDOT posted Notices of Application on, or near the site, on August 4, 2010. WSDOT sent a Notice of Application and Hearing on August 4, 2010 to all recorded property owners within 300' of the project site. The Notice of application was published in the Chinook Observer on August 4, 2010. Under the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), WSDOT has made a Determination of Non-significance for the proposed restoration project (WSDOT SEPA Determination; March 5, 2010). The end of the 14 day comment period was March 24, 2010. An Administrative Hearing was held on September 9, 2010 and an Administrative Hearing Determination was issued on October 14, 2010 and Pacific County approved the Shoreline Substantial Development Permit. WSDOT determined that this project does not have a probable significant adverse impact on the environment. This decision was made after review of a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the lead agency. The Service has incorporated the WSDOT's SEPA documents by reference (Final Signed SEPA WAC 197-11-970 Determination of Non-significance (DNS) March 5, 2010).

Conclusions: Based on my review and evaluation of the information contained in the supporting references, I have determined that the 48.58 acre Tarlatt Slough WSDOT tidal restoration project adjacent to the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, Pacific County, Washington, and donation of Tarlatt Slough and Parpala Slough properties to the Service does not constitute 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. Accordingly, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and the supporting documents will be available to the public for 30 days from the signature date. Copies are available on the Refuge's website and by contacting the refuge directly. The EA and other supporting documents are available for public inspection upon request by contacting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Willapa National Wildlife Refuge Complex at 3888 SR 101, Ilwaco, Washington 98624, and are posted on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/willapa/complex/>.



Assistant Regional Director, Refuges and
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6-14-12

Date

Supporting References

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. June 2012. Environmental Assessment. Willapa National Wildlife Refuge Tarlatt Slough WSDOT Tidal Restoration, Pacific County Washington.

WSDOT Environmental Services. 2010. Tarlatt Mitigation Site Biological Assessment (BA), Pacific County, Washington.

WSDOT Environmental Services. 2010. Tarlatt Slough Wetland Assessment and Advanced Mitigation Proposal, Pacific County, Washington.

WSDOT. 2010. Tarlatt Mitigation Site State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Environmental Checklist. Vancouver, Washington.

WSDOT. 2010. Tarlatt Mitigation Site Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) WAC 197-11-970. Vancouver, Washington.