

Finding of No Significant Impact

State of Utah Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

January 2011

Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency proposes to implement a new program authorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) in the State of Utah. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) provides grants to State and tribal governments to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch, and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, and other compatible recreation and to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their land. The VPA-HIP is administered by the State or tribal government that receives the grant funds.

The State of Utah, through the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to expand its existing public access programs to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, enjoy other recreation, and to improve wildlife habitat on private lands. The UDWR works closely with hundreds of landowners who voluntarily participate in three existing private-land access programs: Cooperative Wildlife Management Unit (CWMU), Landowner Association (LOA), and Walk-In Access (WIA). These programs provide financial incentives and the opportunity to work with state employed biologists for private landowners to allow public access to their lands as well as improve wildlife habitat. These programs have opened more than two million acres of private land to the public in Utah. Public access can vary depending on the specific program. These successful programs increase public awareness about the importance of private lands to individuals who hunt, fish, and enjoy wildlife-related recreation and motivate landowners to conserve wildlife species.

Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative is the Proposed Action which consists of three main components: (1) expand the WIA program to the southern half of the state (it is currently only available in the northern regions of the state); (2) restructure the compensation schedule for the WIA program; and (3) offer habitat improvement as an incentive for landowner participation in all three existing public access programs (CWMU, LOA, and WIA).

Reasons for Finding of No Significant Impact

In consideration of the analysis documented in the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) and in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations 1508.27, the preferred alternative would not constitute a major State or Federal action affecting the human and natural environment. Therefore, this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following:

1. Long-term beneficial impacts and short-term localized impacts would occur with the preferred alternative. Neither of these impacts would be considered significant.
2. The preferred alternative would not affect public health or safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area (cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas) would be preserved with implementation of the preferred alternative.
4. The potential impacts on the quality of the human environment are not considered highly controversial.
5. The potential impacts on the human environment as described in the Programmatic EA are not uncertain nor do they involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The preferred alternative would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. Cumulative impacts of the preferred alternative in combination with other recent, ongoing, or foreseeable future actions are not expected to be significant.
8. The preferred alternative would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
9. The preferred alternative would have long-term beneficial impacts to wildlife and their habitats, including endangered and threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
10. The preferred alternative does not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law imposed for the protection of the environment.

Determination

On the basis of the analysis and information contained in the Programmatic EA and FONSI, it is my determination that adoption of the preferred alternative does not constitute a major Federal action affecting the quality of the human and natural environment. Barring any new data identified during the public and agency review of the Final Programmatic EA that would dramatically change the analysis presented in the EA or identification of a significant controversial issue, the Programmatic EA and this FONSI are considered Final 30 days after date of approval signature.

Brenda Wiltsie

APPROVED:

Signature

January 4, 2011

Date