

Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Assessment (EA):
Invasive Species Eradication for Habitat Restoration on Tangik, Poa and Sud islands,
Alaska

Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has issued an Environmental Assessment which discloses the effects of habitat restoration on three islands by removing introduced non-native rabbits and marmots (the preferred alternative) compared to a No Action alternative.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents our conclusion that the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the quality of the human environment.

Need for and Purpose of the Project

The need for the project is derived from USFWS mission and policy, as well as Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge goals and objectives to restore native biological diversity on islands where non-native species have become established. The specific purpose of this action is to restore native ecosystems on islands adversely modified by two species of introduced mammals, European rabbits and hoary marmots. These introduced mammals disturb and compete with burrow-nesting seabirds for breeding sites, and they alter native plant communities. Similar negative ecological effects of non-native species have been recorded on islands throughout the world.

Public Involvement

Public comments for this project were solicited beginning with initial scoping (which started November 12, 2009), and continuing through administrative review (beginning December 9, 2009) and public comment on the draft EA (January 9-February 10, 2010).

The administrative review included sending an early draft version of the EA to subject-matter experts and to administrators within the USFWS and Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Comments from the administrative review were incorporated into the draft EA that was then released on the Alaska Maritime Refuge web site for a 30-day open period for public comments.

A notice of availability was emailed directly to 200 agencies, organizations, and individuals and to four list serves. Press releases went out statewide through a list serve maintained in the USFWS regional office and were sent also to local newspapers and radio stations near project areas. In addition, printed copies of the EA were distributed to local libraries, Native corporation offices, and to other interested parties. An interview with the refuge manager was aired statewide on Alaska Public Radio Network, and the

refuge invasive species biologist gave a presentation on the project to a conservation organization.

During the public comment period, we received 16 responses: 9 from individuals, 4 from professional scientific organizations, 2 from conservation organizations, and 1 from a governmental agency. Of the 16 responses (13 written and 3 verbal), 14 were in support of the proposed action, 1 respondent was opposed, and 1 respondent proposed a third alternative: to conduct more research at Tangik and Poa on the effects of European rabbits on burrow-nesting seabirds before determining whether to proceed with the Preferred Alternative. Based on the public comments received, the effects of the proposed project on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial.

The three material issues raised during the public comment period are addressed below:

1. One commenter suggested lead shot should not be used to kill rabbits and marmots because of the potential threat of ingestion by birds that might prey on or scavenge carcasses that cannot be retrieved. This suggestion will be implemented and only steel shot or non-toxic lead alternatives will be used.

2. One commenter suggested translocation of some marmots from Sud Island to the mainland near the community of Homer. The subject of translocations was discussed on pages 21 and 22 of the EA where we dismissed that option for the stated reasons. Furthermore, a previous request to Alaska Department of Fish and Game by a local citizen in Homer for a permit to translocate marmots from Sud Island was denied.

3. One commenter suggested further study is needed at Tangik and Poa to decide whether to remove rabbits. In several sections, the EA includes references to studies that have shown that European rabbits adversely affect burrow-nesting seabirds through disturbance and competition for nest sites elsewhere and this is probable at Tangik and Poa. Therefore we believe there is adequate justification for removal of rabbits not only based on negative impacts to seabirds but also adverse modification of native vegetation communities which provide habitat for native birds and invertebrates.

Decision and Rationale

As indicated above, the alternatives analyzed in the draft EA were the No Action Alternative and the Preferred Alternative. A summary of the reasons for selecting the Preferred Alternative over the No Action Alternative are provided below:

No Action Alternative

Allowing introduced rabbits and marmots to continue to damage island ecosystems would not meet the need and purpose of this project. The lack of restoration would not allow the USFWS, including the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, to meet its publically-mandated missions to restore and conserve native biodiversity including native birds and their habitats.

Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative, to restore native biodiversity by removing introduced mammals from islands, was selected because it meets the need and purpose of the project with no significant impacts to human or the natural environment. An explanation of the No Significant Impact finding follows:

Finding of No Significant Impact

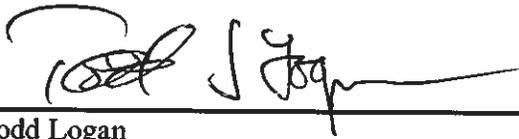
The analysis of the EA indicates there will not be a significant impact, individually or cumulatively, on the quality of human environment as a result of the proposed action. I have determined that the proposed project is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment as defined in Section 102 (2) c of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. This determination is made after full consideration of the context and intensity of the project.

This determination is based upon consideration that the Proposed Action:

- Is not national or regional in scope, but will occur in a limited area and for a limited duration
- Does not create a risk to public safety
- Will not have impacts on unique characteristics of geographic areas such as loss or destruction of historical, cultural and scientific resources, or disturb critical ecological areas; thus based on comments to the EA, the effects on the quality of the human environment from the Proposed Action are not highly controversial
- Are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risk
- Will not establish a precedent for any future action with significant effects
- Does not have cumulative effects
- Complies with the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the proposed action will have no effect on Steller sea lions, sea otters, harbor seals, nor will it jeopardize any federally-listed threatened or endangered species or their habitats)
- Will have no known irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources identified by this assessment
- Complies with federal, state or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (invasive species eradication is consistent with the USFWS responsibility to manage and conserve migratory bird populations under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act conventions and other applicable laws including the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act which gives legal purposes of the Alaska Maritime Refuge to conserve marine birds, other migratory birds, marine mammals and the habitats on which they rely)

Therefore, it is my determination that implementing the Preferred Alternative does not constitute a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

NB 2/16/10



Todd Logan
Alaska Regional Chief
National Wildlife Refuge System

2/17/10

Date