

Finding of No Significant Impact

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program State of Georgia March 2012

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 Georgia. 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 Georgia, through the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division (WRD), proposes to use VPA-HIP grant funds to expand its existing public access program to provide the public with more opportunities to hunt, fish, watch wildlife, enjoy other recreation, and to improve wildlife habitat on private lands. WRD works closely with landowners who voluntarily participate in our Wildlife Management Area (WMA) program. This program provides private landowners with habitat improvements, financial incentives and technical assistance in exchange for public access to their lands and adjoining public waters. This program currently has 120,000 acres of private land opened to the public in Georgia. This successful program also increases awareness about the importance of private lands for individuals who hunt, fish, and enjoy wildlife-related recreation and help motivate landowners to conserve wildlife species.

Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative is the Proposed Action which consists of three main components: (1) expand the WMA program by leasing up to an additional 15,000 acres; (2) augment dove hunting opportunities by adding up to 1,200 acres of leased dove fields; and (3) coordination of transient offers of hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational opportunities by private landowners to the public through the Georgia Outdoor Heritage Recreational Access Program.

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, 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.

APPROVED: 

Signature

March 28, 2012
Date