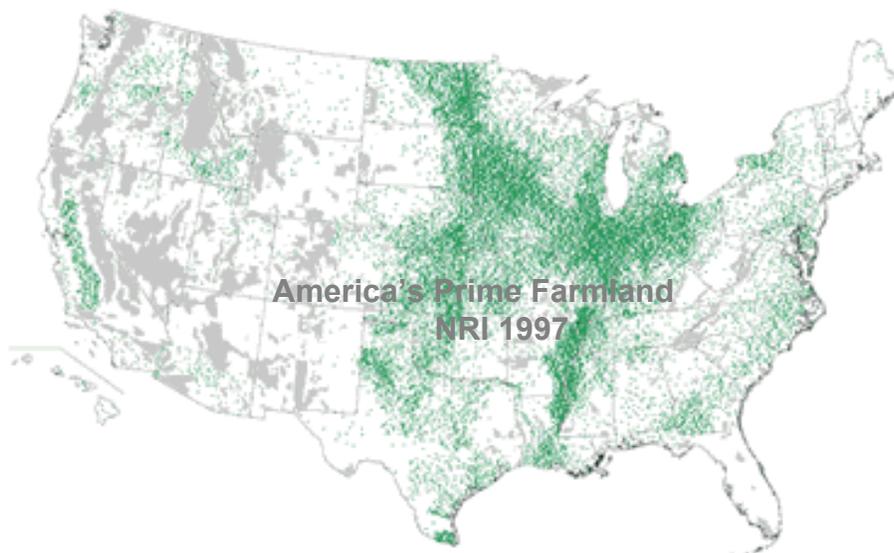


Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Finding of No Significant Impact



May 2003

Finding of No Significant Impact

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. I have preliminarily determined, based upon the evaluation of impacts in the Environmental Assessment (EA), attached hereto and made a part hereof, and the reasons provided below, that there will be no significant individual or cumulative impacts on the quality of the human environment as a result of implementing the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP), particularly when focusing on the significant adverse impacts which NEPA is intended to help decision makers avoid and mitigate against. Therefore, an EIS is not required.

Congress has authorized the FRPP to be implemented in all 50 states. Congress has authorized a total of \$597 million in matching funds to purchase perpetual easements on prime and unique farmland during fiscal years 2002–2007 (EA, p. 6). There are approximately 328 million acres of prime farmland within the United States (EA, p. 2). Of the 328 million acres, the EA indicates about 1.2 million acres will be protected by the program (EA, p. 6). Based on this, and other information provided in the EA, I conclude the program will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment. This is the case when considering impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

NRCS prepares documentation of an environmental evaluation on a site-specific level and, as stated in the EA, will consult with the appropriate organizations to avoid, mitigate or reduce adverse impacts on protected resources (EA, p. 7). NRCS will comply with requirements protecting unique geographic features and other resources, as well as NRCS policies protecting natural and cultural resources (EA, p. 7). Thus, there should be no threat of a violation of any Federal, State or local law or other requirements for the protection of the environment as a result of implementing the FRPP according to the regulation set forth in the FRPP rule. There is no impact on public health or safety identified in this EA or otherwise expected. Furthermore, there is no effect identified that might be considered highly controversial or uncertain or that might involve unique or unknown risks. The proposed action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions except to the extent Congress reauthorizes or amends the program.

Implementation of the FRPP is not sufficiently related to other actions that either individually or cumulatively is likely to result in significant impacts. To the extent other NRCS actions authorized by the FRPP may result in significant effects to the quality of the human environment, a State or area-wide EA or EIS may be prepared separately from the National Programmatic EA.

Based on the information presented in the attached FRPP EA, I find that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared.

BRUCE I. KNIGHT
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

DATE