Flowers and Fresh Cut Greens Promotion and Information Order [7 CFR 1208.200–1208.207] shall be used to conduct the referendum. Ballots will be mailed to all known qualified handlers on or before June 2, 1997. Eligible voters who do not receive a ballot by mail may call the following toll-free telephone number to receive a ballot: 1 (888) 720–9917. All ballots will be subject to verification. Ballots must be received by the referendum agents no later than June 20, 1997, to be counted.

Sonia N. Jimenez and Martha B. Ransom, Research and Promotion Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 2535–S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090–6456, are designated as the referendum agents of the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct the referendum.

Ballots to be cast in the referendum, and any related material relevant to the referendum, will be mailed by the referendum agents to all known qualified handlers. Qualified handlers, as defined in the Order, who had $750,000 gross sales of fresh cut flowers and greens during the representative period are eligible to vote. Persons who have received an exemption from assessment for the entire representative period are ineligible to vote.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 1208

Administrative practice and procedure, Advertising, Consumer information, Marketing agreements, Cut flowers, Cut greens, Promotion, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 6801–6814.

Dated: April 14, 1997.

Michael V. Dunn,

Assistant Secretary, Marketing and Regulatory Programs.

[FR Doc. 97–10166 Filed 4–18–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–02–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Notice of Availability of Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Environmental Impact for the Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program

AGENCY: Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Availability and Finding of No Significant Impact.

SUMMARY: The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is preparing to implement the Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program as provided in an Act making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies (Act) programs for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1997, and for other purposes. The specific elements of this program will be to provide financing to State Boll Weevil Eradication Foundations to enable them to conduct or continue to conduct boll weevil eradication activities in cooperation with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of USDA. In accordance with the Act, the loan funds will supplement program cost-share funds appropriated to and administered by APHIS for boll weevil eradication activities.

The FSA has assessed the potential environmental impacts of this proposed action in the attached Environmental Assessment which is, hereby, incorporated into this notice. Based on this analysis, FSA has determined that the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the Agency will not prepare an environmental impact statement for this proposed action. Although this program is new to FSA as a loan program, APHIS previously operated eradication programs and therefore a 15-day comment period is appropriate. The FSA will make no further decisions regarding this proposed action during a 15-day comment period.

DATES: Written comments regarding this determination should be provided by May 6, 1997.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be submitted to Carolyn B. Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, Farm Service Agency, Stop 0520, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250–0520.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Michael R. Hinton, Chief, Direct Loans and Funding Branch, Farm Loan Programs Loan Making Division, Farm Service Agency, telephone 202–720–1632; facsimile: 202–690–1117; or e-mail: mhintonwdc.fsa.usda.gov

Signed at Washington, DC, on April 15, 1997.

Bruce R. Weber,

Acting Administrator, Farm Service Agency.

Farm Service Agency Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program

Environmental Assessment, March 1997

Agency Contact: Michael R. Hinton, Chief, Funds Management/Direct Loans Branch, Loan Making Division, Farm Service Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, Mail Stop 0522, Washington, DC 20013, (202) 720–1764.

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To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, USDA, Washington, DC 20250, or call 202–720–7327 (voice) or 202–720–1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity employer.

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I. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Farm Service Agency (FSA), is proposing to issue regulations for a loan program in support of the National Boll Weevil Cooperative Control Program (BWCP). FSA loans would support and enable Federal/State/private cooperation for components of a national incremental strategy to eradicate the boll weevil from the U.S. Cotton Belt. The proposal would implement provisions of the ''Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997, '' which directed the Secretary of Agriculture to implement a new loan program to facilitate efforts to eradicate the boll weevil and to protect previous program areas from reinfestation. This programmatic environmental assessment (EA) considers the potential environmental impacts of FSA's proposed loan program and its ''no action'' alternative.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321–4347 (NEPA)) and its implementing regulations, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and its cooperators in boll weevil control analyzed the potential environmental effects of the BWCP in a comprehensive, programmatic environmental document, the ''National Boll Weevil Cooperative Control Program, Final Environmental Impact Statement—1991''(EIS). Subsequent to the publication of the EIS, new program increments have been analyzed within site-specific EA's, and minor program changes/or alterations have been analyzed within other supporting reference documents. The

site-specific EA's and program experience both suggest that there are no significant environmental effects (including those of the synergistic and cumulative variety) at the site-specific level. Copies of the EIS, site-specific EA's, and other reference documents may be reviewed at the APHIS Headquarters, the APHIS Reading Room in Washington, DC, and APHIS' Regional Office (which have announced plans of moving).

National Boll Weevil Eradication Program, Plant Protection and Quarantine, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 4700 River Road, Unit 138, Riverdale, MD 20737

APHIS Reading Room, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, South Building, Room 1141, 14th & Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250.

To assess the potential impacts of FSA's proposed loan program, this programmatic EA provides analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the BWCP. The analysis (1) summarizes and incorporates by reference the findings of the EIS, (2) summarizes and incorporates by reference information in other analytical reference documents pertinent to the BWCP, (3) considers new issues that have been raised since the publication of the EIS, and (4) summarizes FSA plans to further ensure environmental compliance for this loan program.

This EA is intended to be consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508. In keeping with that guidance, the EA integrates existing environmental documentation, facilitates concurrent and cooperative planning, and reduces the administrative documentation burden. Finally, FSA's administration of loans, grants, and guarantees is guided by 7 CFR 1940, Subpart G, which specifies that an environmental assessment should be prepared for proposals of this nature. The 7 CFR Part 1941 will include a new Subpart C, ''Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program,'' including sections 1941.970 through 1941.991.

II. Alternatives

There are two alternatives considered within this environmental assessment—FSA Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program (the proposed action) and no action. Each is characterized in this section.

A. FSA Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program (Proposed Action)

The proposed action, a Federal loan program to support and enable components of the BWCP, would implement provisions of the ''Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997,'' which directed the Secretary of Agriculture to implement a new loan program to facilitate efforts to eradicate the boll weevil and to protect previous program areas from reinfestation. The intended effect is to comply with the Act, assist in boll weevil eradication, and promote cooperation between the USDA and State chartered organizations with regard to boll weevil eradication.

The BWCP is a cooperative effort between cotton growers and Federal and State governments. The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the lead Federal agency for the BWCP, provide eligible grower organizations with (1) equipment, (2) technical and administrative support, and (3) cost-sharing not to exceed 30 percent of the program costs. The portion of the program costs not provided by APHIS are paid by participating grower organizations through the collection of producer assessments. These assessments, often high in early program stages, can create financial hardship for producers.

The FSA Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program will provide loans to eligible grower organizations (not individual growers) for the purpose of spreading startup costs over a period of several years, thereby reducing the initial annual assessments that producers are required to pay and resulting in a financially feasible program.

B. No Action

Under the no action alternative, there would be no FSA Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program. The no action alternative is considered for the purpose of establishing a hypothetical baseline against which the proposed action may be evaluated. Consideration of no action is appropriate for the purpose of this assessment, notwithstanding the explicit mandates of the ''Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1997'' and Congress' direction to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to implement a new loan program. Under the no action alternative, cooperation between Federal, State, and grower groups would likely diminish.

Under a free market system, cotton producers would be expected to, but might not be able to, bear the high assessments in the startup phase of an eradication program. Because of the problems regarding cash flow, some grower groups may not be able to meet their operating expenses and their programs would be forced to be suspended. Suspension of programs in some areas could cause reinvasion by boll weevil populations to the extent that it would put at risk the progress, continuity, and integrity of the BWCP's national strategy to eradicate the boll weevil.

III. Environmental Impacts of Proposed Action and Alternative

The environmental impacts that may result from implementation of the proposed action and its no action alternative are considered in this section. Because the principal environmental concern over this proposed program relates to its use of pesticides, this EA focuses on the potential effects of the proposed program's pesticides.

A. FSA Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program (Proposed Action)

The loan approval process, in and of itself, does not directly generate environmental impacts. However, in the sense that the loan approval process may enable certain increments of the eradication program to take place, it could indirectly contribute to the potential impacts of that control program. Therefore, the environmental impacts from implementation of the eradication program are addressed here.

The national program to eradicate the boll weevil employs a beltwide integrated control strategy. This strategy involves the selection of specific control methods for the individual site based on factors including variation in boll weevil biology, availability of overwintering sites, environmental concerns, weather patterns, and crop production requirements. The integrated control components of this program include limited no action, mechanical control, sterile insect technology, biological control, cultural control, and chemical control. The environmental impacts and related issues of the integrated control methods are described below.

1. Environmental Impacts in General

Most of the issues related to environmental impacts of this program have been analyzed in detail in the EIS and in the ''Chemicals Risk Assessment, Boll Weevil Cooperative Eradication Program, December 1995'' (CRA). The

results of the environmental risk assessments prepared for these two documents are incorporated by reference, and a summary is given within this section.

The history and evaluation of the BWCP has confirmed the analytical predictions of the EIS and site-specific, EA's. For example, completion (in 1990) of the boll weevil eradication program in Georgia resulted (in 1995) in a dramatic resurgence in cotton production, accompanied by a 60% reduction in post-eradication insecticide treatments, 30% reduction in pest management costs, and 70% reduction in overall crop damage (Haney *et al.*, 1996). Similarly, the BWCP's carefully managed efforts in Alabama resulted in diminished pesticide use, greater survival of beneficial arthropods, and preservation of the effectiveness of pyrethroid chemistry for years to come (Smith and Foshee, 1993). Finally, a series of monitoring reports (some with special focus on human health or endangered species) have been done for program increments. Those monitoring reports have documented appropriate use and deposition of pesticides, have confirmed that there have been no adverse impacts on humans, and confirmed that the programs' protection measures have adequately protected endangered and threatened species.

The nonchemical control methods have minimal impact on human health, the physical environment, and nontarget species. The use of ''no action'' buffer zones and related practices for the limited no action method reduce the risk of exposure and effects from program pesticides. The use of methods, such as mechanical control (trapping) and sterile insect technique, that directly target only boll weevils have little impact on human health, the physical environment, and nontarget species. The disturbance from vehicular and foot travel is negligible and exposure to trap chemicals is minimal. The use of biological control is associated with reduced need for chemical pesticides and commensurate reductions in exposure and impacts. The use of cultural control methods (crop rotation, short-season varieties, and mandatory postharvest stalk destruction) pose minimal risks to equipment operators, slight losses from soil disruption, and no impacts to nontarget species that exceed the effects of current practices.

The potential impacts of the chemical control methods relate to the program use of any of the six pesticides: azinphos-methyl, diflubenzuron, endosulfan, malathion, methyl parathion, and oxamyl. Refer to the EIS and CRA for greater detail on the formulations and use patterns. The potential impacts to human health, the physical environment, and nontarget species were assessed through both quantitative and qualitative methods. Hazard information (pesticide toxicity and environmental fate) was integrated with exposure predictions to develop the risk characterization. Potential exposure scenarios were analyzed for dermal, inhalation, and dietary exposures of the public and program workers from applications of each program chemical.

Human health risk was quantified by comparing predicted exposure to toxicity reference levels based upon intrinsic hazards as described in detail in the EIS (volume 1, appendix B, section B.4) and in the CRA (chapter 3). Those toxicity reference values were applied to expected exposures to quantify risk. The classifications of the program pesticide's acute human oral toxicities are as follows: slight for malathion, very slight for diflubenzuron, and moderate to severe for azinphos-methyl, endosulfan, methyl parathion, and oxamyl. The potential risk to program workers and the general public are presented in the programmatic EIS (volume 1, appendix B, section B.4.) and in the CRA (chapter 5, section A), Comprehensive training of all workers assures that there will be adequate margins of safety to prevent adverse effects for all likely exposure routes. Likewise, the margins of safety to the general public result in minimal risk and adequate safety against adverse effects.

Qualitative risk assessment is used to analyze risks that cannot be quantified easily, especially those involving incomplete exposure information or unclear relationships between dose and response. Thorough discussions of qualitative risks are presented in the EIS and CRA. Qualitative risks are determined for effects from program pesticide formulations' impurities and degradation products, anticipated cumulative and synergistic effects, and effects on sensitive subgroups. Program quality control guidelines require proper storage conditions and sampling of the product to ensure that impurities and degradation products pose no significant hazard to workers or the general public. Cumulative and synergistic effects of the program chemicals are minimized through the use of proper safety procedures and adherence to safe reentry periods. Refer to the EIS and CRA for more information about synergism. Certain individuals may have increased risk due to location, disease state, or other biological characteristics. Those living next to a cotton field are at greatest risk. Infants may be more sensitive than adults to the effects of exposure to program pesticides. Individuals on certain medicines may be at increased risk. Individuals with multiple chemical sensitivity may be extremely sensitive to even very low levels of exposure to a variety of chemical agents. Proper notification, instruction about reentry precautions, and adherence to recommended safety precautions, reduces potential for exposure to program chemicals and resultant risks.

The chemical pesticides proposed for use in the program have potential to affect the physical environment (air, water, land). Program pesticides are not expected to affect the air quality in the general sense, but localized off-site drift may occur. This drift is expected to be minimal because the proposed program chemicals have low volatility and program precautions limit potential for drift (refer to table 2–1 of the EIS and chapter 2 of the CRA). The potential for soil pollution is expected to be minimal. Sophisticated guidance and control systems of application equipment (such as the global positioning systems), rapid degradation of program pesticides, and lack of persistence of residues contribute to minimal impact (refer to volume 1, appendix B, section B.8. of the EIS and chapter 2 of the CRA). The potential for runoff of program pesticides is greatest if rainfall occurs shortly after treatments, but operating procedures and recommended mitigation measures (tables 2–1 and 2–2 of the EIS) serve to minimize the effects of program chemicals on bodies of water. Modeling of the movement of program pesticides in soil following applications indicates that the potential for percolation of pesticide residues to groundwater is negligible.

Risks of the potential adverse effects of program chemicals to nontarget species (domestic animals, wildlife, and plant) are characterized as low, moderate, or high for routine and extreme scenarios. The methodology is presented in detail in the EIS (volume 1, appendix B, sections B.5. to B.7.) and CRA (chapter 6). Detailed results of the nontarget risk assessments are found in tables 4–3 through 4–6 of the EIS and tables VI–1 through VI–3 of the CRA. The data are summarized briefly as follows: Malathion poses little risk to most terrestrial organisms, but can pose a high risk to fish, amphibians, and aquatic invertebrates. Potential drift concentrations of azinphos-methyl present little risk, but a direct spray may present moderate to high risk to terrestrial organisms. For aquatic

species, azinphos-methyl presents a high risk to fish, amphibians, and aquatic invertebrates. Potential drift concentrations of methyl parathion may present a moderate risk to some terrestrial species, while a direct spray presents moderate to high risks. Also, methyl parathion poses moderate risk to aquatic invertebrates. Diflubenzuron presents little risk to terrestrial organisms but may pose moderate to high risk to aquatic invertebrates. Endosulfan presents little risk to most terrestrial and aquatic species, but poses a moderate risk to mammals. Oxamyl presents little risk to aquatic species, but poses moderate risk to most terrestrial wildlife species. Standard program operational procedures and mitigations reduce the potential for exposure of domestic animals and wildlife.

Although program applications of pesticides pose no direct risk to plant species, there may be some indirect risk to plants associated with adverse effects to pollinators. It is unlikely that the application of pesticides used in the program would eliminate all pollinators for the length of time sufficient to prevent pollination, but pesticides could temporarily reduce the number of potential pollinators for a particular plant species. Honey bees are important as crop pollinators and honey producers in many areas. As a precaution, prior to treatments with azinphos-methyl, malathion, methyl parathion, or oxamyl, program personnel with notify registered apiarists in or near the treatment area of the date and approximate time of the treatment application.

2. Program Changes or Additions

a. Addition of new pesticides. Since the publication of the EIS, two additional pesticides (endosulfan and oxamyl) have been approved for the program. Information on those pesticides and their potential effects is presented in a comprehensive manner in the CRA and has been included in the above section, ''Environmental Impacts in General.''

b. Changing managerial roles. Since the BWCP's beginning, APHIS has been the lead Federal agency for the program, providing personnel and substantial funding. Its involvement has been critical to the program's success and expansion across nearly 4 million acres of cotton in 10 States. As of the publication of this EA, the program in the Southeast is rapidly moving toward completion and the program's Federal resources in that area are changing. As work units are consolidated and configured for post-eradication surveillance, Federal positions and funds are being reduced.

As the program expands into remaining infested areas of the Midsouth, most, if not all, of the funding for those remaining areas will be provided by growers. The transition from Federal leadership and control to grower leadership and control will continue, characterized by a steadily diminishing APHIS role in the daily management of program operations. APHIS has indicated that it will remain actively involved in providing technical support and assistance to grower groups. APHIS also has indicated that it intends to continue its involvement with the National Cotton Council's Boll Weevil Action Committee, consulting on the most effective way to allocate and utilize funds which may be appropriated for boll weevil eradication.

The environmental impact of changing managerial roles is difficult to predict with certainty. Because the program's potential environmental impacts are related to its eradication strategies (control methods, operational procedures, and mitigation methods), any changes in those could result in a change in the extent or severity of impacts. It is not likely, however, that increasing grower leadership and control in the program will result in substantial changes to the eradication strategies. Thus, no changes are expected in the program's potential environmental impacts as a consequence of changing managerial roles. (It also should be noted that FSA has no managerial role in the BWCP, but functions solely in the approval, processing, and granting of loans to the BWCP's member organizations.)

3. New Issues

Although the potential environmental impacts of boll weevil control strategies have been analyzed in the EIS and CRA, some new issues have arisen since their publication. The most important of those issues and the program's response to those issues are summarized in this section.

a. Environmental justice. The concept of ''environmental justice'' was addressed in a general way by Executive Order 12898, ''Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations'' (EO 12898), signed on February 11, 1994. It was designed to make Federal agencies identify and address ''* * * as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations * * *.'' Since EO 12898's publication, environmental justice review has become a standard part of the site-specific environmental assessment process for the BWCP. Ethnic, social, and economic characteristics of program areas are considered in the development, as appropriate, of innovative strategies to communicate with, involve, and accommodate the public. Although environmental justice concerns are reviewed for all new program increments, those concerns have increased importance where the composition of communities warrants extra or ''tailored'' protection measures and operational procedures. Program managers have promptly acknowledged those communities' special needs and worked with the communities to accommodate them. Following are examples of the kinds of additional things that may be done in some program areas to ensure environmental justice.

1. Special site visits and interviews of community members.
2. Special scoping meetings to identify potential environmental impacts and problems.
3. Additional public meetings and/or hearings.
4. Language translations for meetings, environmental documents, and signs.
5. Additional lead time for public notification of impending pesticide applications.
6. Specially tailored protection measures.
7. More stringent program oversight and monitoring for pesticide drift.
8. Use of extremely precise global positioning systems for pesticide application.

FSA will also consider environmental justice within the context of its loan approval process, adhering to the principles espoused in EO 12898. Loan approvals will be granted without discrimination based on race, religion, color, national origin, gender, or other prohibited basis. Further, FSA requires that no recipient of a boll weevil eradication loan will directly, or through contractual or other arrangement, subject any person or cause any person to be subjected to discrimination on any of the above factors. Borrowers must comply with all applicable Federal laws and regulations regarding equal opportunity in hiring, procurement, and related matters. Lastly, FSA strives to ensure environmental justice in its loan approval process through its adherence to NEPA implementation procedures, improved accessibility of meetings, critical documents, and notices.

b. Potential influence on endocrine systems. Several recent studies have analyzed the effects of chemical exposure on the endocrine systems of humans and wildlife (Stone, 1994; Arnold et al., 1996; Kendall and Dickerson, 1996; Ramamoorthy et al., 1997). This has become a major issue in science and public policy. The quantification of these effects and the elucidation of their mechanisms of toxic action have not been studied in detail. Because the issue has arisen subsequent to the publication of the EIS and the CRA, available literature on these effects relevant to the program chemicals was reviewed.

A comprehensive literature review revealed inconclusive information linking only one of the program chemicals to this effect. One study found that endosulfan's reported ability to disrupt estrogen production was synergized by exposure to other compounds (Arnold *et al.*, 1996). However, another study did not find this relationship (Ramamoorthy *et al.*, 1997). The limited data and published research on this topic make it difficult to conduct a thorough risk assessment, but the exposures determined from risk assessment scenarios can be compared to concentrations shown to cause adverse effects in these studies. Even under the assumption that the study that showed the linkage was correct, the program's operational procedures and mitigation methods generally reduce the potential for exposure and resultant adverse effects. Comparing the effects data of Arnold *et al.* (1996), typical human exposures to endosulfan from program scenarios do not reach levels greater than 1,000-fold lower than this data and typical wildlife exposures to endosulfan from program scenarios do not achieve levels greater than 10-fold lower than this data. This indicates that exposures from program applications of endosulfan would not be anticipated to result in endocrine disruption to any exposed animals or humans.

4. Sequential Compliance

a. Site-specific analysis. This programmatic EA considers in general the impacts of the FSA Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program and its no action alternative. The impacts of FSA's loan program (the proposed action) are related indirectly to the impacts of the BWCP, which were analyzed programmatically in the EIS and CRA, and site-specifically in APHIS EA's tiered to the EIS. Thus far, those site-specific EA's have revealed no significant impact from localized implementation of the BWCP's boll weevil control strategies.

As the BWCP expands and additional areas are taken under control, the potential impacts of program implementation in those areas will be analyzed in additional site-specific EA's prepared by APHIS or other Federal cooperators (if APHIS' role is substantially diminished or eliminated in the future). For those site-specific EA's where there is a high probability that the grower organization may apply for a boll weevil eradication loan, FSA will serve as a cooperating agency for determining that no significant environmental impacts will exist. Thus, the determination of potential environmental effect for individual FSA boll weevil eradication loans is based primarily upon information in the EIS, the CRA, and this EA, but is subject to further modification by site-specific EA's for new program areas.

b. Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance. The ESA and its implementing regulations require Federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and/or the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. APHIS currently consults with these agencies and prepares biological assessments for each new increment of the BWCP. (If APHIS' role is eliminated in this process, another Federal agency would need to take that role.) For those species for which potential adverse effects are identified, additional protective measures are developed and submitted as part of the biological assessment to FWS for concurrence. The BWCP will comply with all protection measures stipulated in the biological assessment and mutually agreed on by FWS.

B. No Action

Implementation of the no action alternative would mean that there would be no Federal loan program to support the BWCP. That would have two principal effects—a devastating effect on the quality and quantity of cotton production in the United States and the likelihood of increased adverse impacts from the extensive private use of pesticides. The most adverse impact of the no action alternative would be the effects on the quality and quantity of cotton production in the United States. More cotton would be ruined from boll weevil infestation and less would be available for sale and processing. Growers profits would be reduced and consumers' costs would be increased.

The lack of continuity for program funding could make it increasingly difficult for growers near the edge of the eradicated zones to prevent future reinfestation of their fields from the areas not yet eradicated. The pesticide levels required to renew control would increase to pre-eradication levels, with associated adverse impacts. Those adverse impacts would increase dramatically because of the need for multiple applications and the use of some pesticides that pose greater environmental hazards than the program pesticides. These greater hazards could impact human health, the physical environment, and nontarget species.

IV. Listing of Agencies and Persons Consulted

Gary Cunningham, Coordinator, National Boll Weevil Eradication Program, Plant Protection and Quarantine, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 4700 River Road, Unit 138, Riverdale, MD 20737–1236

Bill Grefenstette, Senior Operations Officer, National Boll Weevil Eradication Program, Plant Protection and Quarantine, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 4700 River Road, Unit 138, Riverdale, MD 20737–1236

Harold T. Smith, Environmental Protection Officer, Environmental Analysis and Documentation, Policy and Program Development, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 4700 River Road, Unit 149, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238

David A. Bergsten, Toxicologist, Environmental Analysis and Documentation, Policy and Program Development, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 4700 River Road, Unit 149, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238

Appendix—References

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Finding of No Significant Impact For Farm Service Agency Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program Environmental Assessment

March 1997.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency (FSA), has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for its participation in the National Boll Weevil Cooperative Control Program (boll weevil program) through the provision of a loan program. The EA, incorporated into this document by reference, is also tiered to the ''Final Environmental Impact Statement for the National Boll Weevil Cooperative Control Program-1991.'' The EA is available from: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, 14th and Independence Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20250–0513.

This EA is programmatic in scope and considered the impacts of two alternatives: (1) the no action alternative, and (2) the proposed alternative that encompasses the current control program. The current program includes chemical, biological, cultural, and mechanical control methods. The proposed program is needed in order to (1) reduce agricultural losses caused by the boll weevil and allow growers to remain economically competitive, (2) substantially reduce the amount of pesticides used against the boll weevil and other pests, (3) maintain the biological integrity and efficacy of the national program to eradicate the boll weevil, and (4) comply with relevant pest control statutes and regulations.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is consulting with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) with regard to the protection of endangered and threatened species and their critical habitats. All boll weevil control activity will adhere to protective measures designed specifically for this program and mutually agreed to with FWS.

I find that implementation of the proposed boll weevil eradication program as described in the EA and all referenced documents will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment.

I have considered and base my findings of no significant impact on the quantitative and qualitative analyses and risk assessments of the proposed pesticides as well as a review of the program's overall operational characteristics. In addition, I find that the environmental process undertaken for the boll weevil eradication program is entirely consistent with the principles of ''environmental justice,'' as defined in Executive Order No. 12898. Furthermore, since I have not found evidence of significant environmental impact associated with this program, there is no need to prepare an environmental impact statement and the program may proceed as described in the referenced documents.

Dated: April 15, 1997.

Bruce R. Weber,

Acting Administrator, Farm Service Agency.

[FR Doc. 97–10206 Filed 4–18–97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–05–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Revision of the Land and Resources Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest, Alaska

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement and a revised land and resource management plan for the Chugach National Forest.

SUMMARY: The Chugach National Forest will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for revising the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), and a revised Forest Plan document, pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(5) and 36 CFR 219.12. The revised plan will supersede the current Forest Plan, which was approved on July 27, 1984 and which has been amended six times.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments pertaining to the revision of the Forest Plan to: Forest Plan Revision, Chugach National Forest, 3301 C St., Suite 300, Anchorage, AK 99503–3998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Gary Lehnhausen, Forest Planning Team Leader; (907) 271–2560 or FAX (907) 271–3992.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Forest Plans are ordinarily revised on a 10-year cycle, or at least every 15 years (U.S.C. 1604(f)(5) and 36 CFR 219.10(g)). Forest Plans guide the overall management of the National Forests through the following six management direction elements:

(1) Forest multiple-use goals and objectives, 36 CFR 219.11(b);

(2) Forest-wide management requirements (standards and guidelines) 16 U.S.C. 1604 and 36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27;

(3) Management areas and management area direction (management area prescriptions) 36 CFR 219.11(c);

(4) Designated suitable timber land (16 U.S.C. 1604(k) and 36 CFR 219.14) and an allowable timber sale quantity (16 U.S.C. 1611 and 36 CFR 219.16):

(5) Nonwilderness allocations or wilderness recommendations where 36 CFR 219.17 applies; and

(6) Monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11(d)).

The Forest Service has determined there is a need to make some changes to the 1984 Forest Plan, as amended. The revised Plan will be developed to address management of the Chugach National Forest. The following preliminary issues have been identified through monitoring and evaluation, project planning and implementation activities, and public comments received during the life of the existing Plan.

Preliminary Issues

Roadless Area Management and Wilderness Recommendations

There is interest in the management of existing roadless areas. Some people feel that more of the Chugach National Forest should be allocated to protective designations, or recommend for wilderness, in order to conserve biological diversity, provide primitive recreational opportunities, provide opportunities for scientific research or baseline monitoring, protect unique features and resources, and provide for other non-commodity values and uses. Others are concerned that protective designations could limit or constrain recreation uses, fish and wildlife enhancement opportunities, increased access, commodity uses, and economic returns to local communities. Currently, about 98 percent of the 5.4 million acre Forest is roadless and potentially eligible for wilderness designation.

Recreation and Tourism

There is a concern about changes to tourism and recreation on the Forest. The recent decision by the State of Alaska to build a road to Whittier is expected to greatly increase recreation and tourism use of the Prince William